The New York Edition of Henry James

HENRY JAMES

The Reverberator
Madame de Mauves
A Passionate Pilgrim
The Madonna of The Future
Louisa Pallant

$6.00

The Reverberator
Madame de Mauves
A Passionate Pilgrim
And Other Tales

HENRY JAMES

No theme was closer to the heart of Henry James than that of the anxieties—and triumphs—of Americans abroad. No volume of the New York Edition covers the subject more completely than this.

Francie Dosson, the heroine of *The Reverberator,* might pass for a cousin of Daisy Miller, so appealing is the blend of bravery and ignorance with which she confronts the conventions of the Old World. *The Reverberator* was first published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1888.

Madame de Mauves, dating from 1874, is a tale in which James caught all the nobility of resignation. "I've a request to make of you," asks the American Longmore of his American friend Madame de Mauves. "That you think of me as a man who has felt much and claimed little." When she refuses to be freed from her unhappy marriage, her stand calls forth his deepest admiration.

A Passionate Pilgrim, which was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1871, is the chronicle of a would-be Englishman, a wistful American who visits the estate of an English kinsman on whose property he has a vague claim. He falls in love with his

(continued on back flap)

THE NOVELS AND TALES OF HENRY JAMES

New York Edition

VOLUME XIII

THE REVERBERATOR

MADAME DE MAUVES

A PASSIONATE PILGRIM

AND OTHER TALES

HENRY JAMES

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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PREFACE

I HAVE gathered into this volume some early brevities, the third in order of which dates from further back than any tale comprised in the Edition. The first in order appeared considerably later, but I have given it precedence in this group by reason of its greatest length. It is the most recent in the list, but, as having originally (in the good old days, though they are as yet none so remote, of "pleasant" publication) enjoyed the honour of two pretty little volumes "all to itself," it falls into the category of Shorter Novels — under an indulgence not extended to several of its compeers. "The Reverberator," which figured at birth (1888) in half a dozen numbers of "Macmillan's Magazine" may be described, I suppose, beyond any fiction here reproduced, as a *jeu d'esprit:* I can think at least of none other on the brow of which I may presume to place that laurel. And yet as I cast about me for the nameable grounds of the hospitality I thus give it I find myself think of it in other rich lights as well; quite in the light of an exemplary anecdote, and at the same time quite in that of a little rounded drama. This is to press hard, it might seem, on so slight a composition; but I brave the extravagance under the interest of recognising again how the weight of expatiation is ever met in such cases — that of the slender production equally with that of the stout — by a surface really much larger than the mere offered face of the work. The face of the work may be small in itself, and yet the surface, the whole thing, the associational margin and connexion, may spread, beneath the fond remembering eye, like nothing more noble than an insidious grease-spot. It is of the essence of the anecdote to get itself told as it can — which truth represented clearly the best chance of life for the matter involved in "The Reverberator"; but also it is of the essence of the drama to conform to logic, and the

pages I here treat of may appear at moments not quite predominantly sure either of their luck or of their law. This, however, I think, but to a cursory glance, for I perhaps do them a wrong in emphasising their anecdotic cast. Might I not, certainly, have invoked for them in some degree the anecdotic grace I would n't have undertaken them at all; but I now see how they were still to have been provided for if this had failed them.

The anecdote consists, ever, of something that has oddly happened to some one, and the first of its duties is to point directly to the person whom it so distinguishes. He may be you or I or any one else, but a condition of our interest — perhaps the principal one — is that the anecdote shall know him, and shall accordingly speak of him, as its subject. Who is it then that by this rule the specimen before us adopts and sticks to? Something happens, and to a certain person, or, better, to a certain group of persons, in "The Reverberator," but of whom, when it comes to the point, is the fable narrated? The anecdote has always a question to answer — of whom necessarily is it told? Is it told here of the Proberts or of the Dossons? To whom in the instance before us does the principal thing, the thing worth the telling, happen? To the fatal Mr. Flack, to Francie Dosson and her father and sister, lumping them, on the ground of their "racial consciousness," all together? — or to the cluster of scandalised Parisians in general, if not to the girl's distracted young lover in particular? It is easy, alas, to defy a clear statement on this head to be made ("No, I can't say whom or what or *which* I 'm about: I seem so sometimes to be about one set and sometimes about another!" the little story is free to plead) whereby anecdotic grace does break down. Fortunately there remains another string, a second, to my bow: I should have been nowhere, in the event of a challenge, had I not concomitantly felt my subject, for all its slightness, as a small straight *action*, and so placed it in that blest drama-light which, really making for intelligibility as nothing else does, orders and regulates, even when but faintly turned on; squares things and keeps them in happy relation to each other.

What "happens," by that felicity, happens thus to every one concerned, exactly as in much more prodigious recitals: it 's a case — just as we have seen it before, in more portentous connexions and with the support of mightier comparisons — of the planned rotation of aspects and of that "scenic" determination of them about which I fear I may already have been a bore.

After which perhaps too vertiginous explanatory flight I feel that I drop indeed to the very concrete and comparatively trivial origin of my story — short, that is, of some competent critical attribution of triviality all round. I am afraid, at any rate, that with this reminiscence I but watch my grease-spot (for I cling to the homely metaphor) engagingly extend its bounds. Who shall say thus — and I have put the vain question but too often before! — where the associational nimbus of the all but lost, of the miraculously recovered, chapter of experience shall absolutely fade and stop? That would be possible only were experience a chessboard of sharp black-and-white squares. Taking one of these for a convenient plot, I have but to see my particle of suggestion lurk in its breast, and then but to repeat in this connexion the act of picking it up, for the whole of the *rest* of the connexion straightway to loom into life, its parts all clinging together and pleading with a collective friendly voice that I can't pretend to resist: "Oh but we too, you know; what were *we* but of the experience?" Which comes to scarce more than saying indeed, no doubt, that nothing more complicates and overloads the act of retrospect than to let one's imagination itself work backward as part of the business. Some art of preventing this by keeping that interference out would be here of a useful application; and would include the question of providing conveniently for the officious faculty in the absence of its natural caretakers, the judgement, the memory, the conscience, occupied, as it were, elsewhere. These truants, the other faculties of the mind without exception, I surmise, would then be free to remount the stream of time (as an earnest and enquiring band) with the flower of the flock, the hope of the family, left at home or "boarded out,"

say, for the time of the excursion. I have been unable, I confess, to make such an arrangement; the consequence of which failure is that everything I "find," as I look back, lives for me again in the light of *all* the parts, such as they are, of my intelligence. Or to express the phenomenon otherwise, and perhaps with still more complacency for it, the effort to reconstitute the medium and the season that favoured the first stir of life, the first perceived gleam of the vital spark, in the trifle before us, fairly makes everything in the picture revive, fairly even extends the influence to matters remote and strange. The musing artist's imagination — thus *not* excluded and confined — supplies the link that is missing and makes the whole occasion (the occasion of the glorious birth to him of still another infant motive) comprehensively and richly *one*. And this if that addition to his flock — his effusive parental welcome to which seems immediately to cause so splendid and furnished and fitted a world to arch over it — happens to be even of so modest a promise as the tiny principle of "The Reverberator."

It was in a grand old city of the south of Europe (though neither in Rome nor yet in Florence) long years ago, and during a winter spent there in the seeing of many people on the pleasantest terms in the world, as they now seem to me to have been, as well as in the hearing of infinite talk, talk mainly, inexhaustibly, about persons and the "personal equation" and the personal mystery. This somehow *had* to be in an odd, easy, friendly, a miscellaneous, many-coloured little cosmopolis, where the casual exotic society was a thing of heterogeneous vivid patches, but with a fine old native basis, the basis that held stoutly enough together while the patches dangled and fluttered, stitched on as with thread of silver, pinned on as with pearls, lasting their time above all and brightening the scene. To allude to the scene, alas! seems half an undertaking to reproduce it, any humoursome indulgence in which would lead us much too far. Nor am I strictly — as if I cultivated an ideal of strictness! — concerned with any fact but that of the appearance among us, that winter, of a charming free young person, superlatively

introduced and infinitely admired, who, taken to twenty social bosoms, figured "success" in a form, that of the acclaimed and confident pretty girl of our prosaic and temperate climes, for which the old-world salon, with its windows of iridescent view and its different conception of the range of charm, had never much provided. The old-world salon, in our community, still, when all was said, more or less imposed the type and prescribed the tone; yet to the charming stranger even these penetralia had not been closed, and, over them, to be brief, she had shed her influence, just as among them, not less, she had gathered her harvest. She had come, in fine, she had seen and had conquered; after which she had withdrawn with her spoil. Her spoil, to put it plainly, had been a treasure of impressions; her harvest, as I have said, a wealth of revelations. I made an absence of several weeks, I went to Florence and to Rome, but I came back in the spring — and all to encounter the liveliest chatter of surprise that had perhaps ever spent itself under the elegant massive ceilings for which the old-world salons were famous. The ingenious stranger — it was awfully coming to light — had *written* about them, about these still consciously critical retreats, many of them temples harbouring the very altar of the exclusive; she had made free with them, pen in hand, with the best conscience in the world, no doubt, but to a high effect of confidence betrayed, and to the amazement and consternation of every one involved, though most of all, naturally, to the dismay of her primary backers.

The young lady, frankly, a graceful amateur journalist, had made use of her gathered material; she had addressed to a newspaper in her native city (which no power on earth would induce me to designate, so that as to this and to the larger issue, not less, of the glamour of its big State-name, I defy all guesses) a letter as long, as confidential, as "chatty," as full of headlong history and limping legend, of aberration and confusion, as she might have indited to the most trusted of friends. The friend trusted had been, as happened, simply the biggest "reading public" in the world, and the performance, typographically bristling, had winged its way

back to its dishonoured nest like some monstrous black bird or beetle, an embodiment of popping eyes, a whirl of brandished feathers and claws. Strange, it struck me, to tell the truth, the fact itself of "anybody's knowing," and still more of anybody's caring — the fact itself, that is, of such prompt repercussion and recognition: one would so little, in advance, have supposed the reverberation of the bomb, its heeded reverberation, conceivable. No such consequence, clearly, had been allowed for by its innocent maker, for whose imagination, one felt sure, the explosion had not been designed to be world-shaking. The recording, slobbering sheet, as an object thinkable or visible in a medium so non-conducting, made of actual recognition, made even of the barest allusion, the falsest of false notes. The scandal reigned, however, and the commotion lasted, a nine days' wonder; the ingenuous stranger's name became anathema, and all to the high profit of an incorrigible collector of "cases." Him in his depth of perversity, I profess, the flurry of resentment could only, after a little, affect as scarce more charged with wisdom than the poor young lady's miscalculated overflow itself; so completely beside the question of the finer *comparative* interest remained that of the force of the libel and that of the degree of the injury. The finer interest was in the facts that made the incident a case, and the true note of that, I promptly made sure, was just in the extraordinary amount of native innocence that positively *had* to be read into the perpetrated act. The couple of columns in the vulgar newspaper constituted no document whatever on the manners and morals of the company of persons "betrayed," but on the other hand, in its indirect way, flooded "American society" with light, became on *that* side in the highest degree documentary. So it was, I soon saw, that though the perpetrated act was in itself and immediately no "situation," it nevertheless pointed to one, and was for that value to be stored up.

It remained for a long time thus a mere sketched finger-post: the perpetrated act had, unmistakeably, *meant* something — one could n't make out at first exactly what; till at

last, after several years of oblivion, its connexions, its illustrative worth, came quite naturally into view. It fell in short into the wider perspective, the very largest fund of impressions and appearances, perhaps, that the particular observer's and designer's mind was to have felt itself for so long queerly weighted with. I have already had occasion to say that the "international" light lay thick, from period to period, on the general scene of my observation — a truth the reasons and bearings of which will require in due course to be intelligibly stated; everything that possibly could, at any rate, managed at that time (as it had done before and was undiscourageably to continue to do) to *be* international for me: which was an immense resource and a happy circumstance from many points of view. Therefore I may say at once that if no particular element or feature of the view had struck me from far back as receiving so much of the illumination as the comparative *state of innocence* of the spirit of my countryfolk, by that same token everything had a price, was of immediate application and found itself closely interwoven, that could tend to emphasise or vivify the innocence. I had indeed early to recognise that I was in a manner shut up to the contemplation of it — really to the point, it has often seemed to me these pages must testify, of appearing to wander, as under some uncanny spell, amid the level sands and across the pathless desert of a single and of a not especially rich or fruitful aspect. Here, for that matter, comes in one of the oddest and most interesting of facts — as I measure it; which again will take much stating, but to which I may provisionally give *this* importance, that, sketchily speaking, if I had n't had, on behalf of the American character, the negative aspects to deal with, I should practically, and given the limits of my range, have had no aspects at all. I shall on a near pretext, as I say, develop the sense of this; but let it now stand for the obvious truth that the negative sides were always *at* me, for illustration, for interpretation, and that though I looked yearningly, from time to time, over their collective head, though, after an experimental baffled sniff, I was apt to find myself languish for sharper air than

any they exhaled, they constantly gave me enough, and more than enough, to "tackle," so that I might even well ask myself what more miscellaneous justice I should have been able to render.

Given, after this fashion, my condition of knowledge, the most general appearance of the American (of those days) in Europe, that of being almost incredibly *unaware of life* — as the European order expressed life — had to represent for me the *whole* exhibitional range; the particular initiation on my own part that would have helped me to other apprehensions being absolutely bolted and barred to me. What this alternative would have stood for we shall immediately see; but meanwhile — and nothing could have been at once more inevitable, more logical and more ridiculous — I was reduced to studying my New Yorkers and my Bostonians, since there were enough of these alone and to spare, under the queer rubric of their more or less stranded helplessness. If asked why I describe in such terms the appearances that most appealed to me, I can only wonder how the bewildered state of the persons principally figuring in the Americano-European prospect could have been otherwise expressed. They come back to me, in the lurid light of contrast, as irresistibly destitute of those elements of preparedness that my pages show even the most limited European adventure to call into play. This at least was, by my retrospect, the inveterate case for the men — it differed only for certain of the women, the younger, the youngest, those of whom least might at the best have been expected, and in the interest of whose "success" their share of the characteristic blankness underwent what one might call a sea-change. Conscious of so few things in the world, these unprecedented creatures — since that is what it came to for them — were least of all conscious of deficiencies and dangers; so that, the grace of youth and innocence and freshness aiding, their negatives were converted and became in certain relations lively positives and values. I might give a considerable list of those of my fictions, longer and shorter, in which this curious conversion is noted. Suffice it, at all events, in re-

spect to the show at large, that, even as testifying but to a suffered and suffering state, and working beauty and comedy and pathos but into that compass, my procession of figures — which kept passing, and indeed kept pausing, by no act of my own — left me with all I could manage on my hands.

This will have seemed doubtless a roundabout approach to my saying that I seized the right connexion for our roaring young lioness of the old-world salons from the moment I qualified her as, in spite of the stimulating commerce enjoyed with them, signally "unaware of life." What had she lacked for interest? what had her case lacked for application? what in the world but just that perceived reference to something larger, something more widely significant? What was so large, what so widely significant in its general sphere, as that, "otherwise" so well endowed and appointed, as that, altogether so well constituted and introduced, she *could* have kept up to the end (the end of our concern with her) the state of unawareness? Immense at any rate the service she so rendered the brooding critic capable of taking a hint from her, for she became on the spot an inimitable link with the question of what it might distinguishably be in their own flourishing Order that could *keep* them, the passionless pilgrims, so unaware? This was the point — one had caught them in the act of it; of a disposition, which had perhaps even most a comic side, to treat "Europe," collectively, as a vast painted and gilded holiday toy, serving its purpose on the spot and for the time, but to be relinquished, sacrificed, broken and cast away, at the dawn of any other convenience. It seemed to figure thus not only as a gorgeous dressed doll, the most expensive plaything, no doubt, in the world, but as a *living* doll, precisely, who would speak and act and perform, all for a "charge" — which was the reason both of the amusement and of the cost. Only there was no more *responsibility* to a living doll than to a dead — so that, in fine, what seemed most absent from the frolic intercourse was the note of anything like reciprocity: unless indeed the so prompt

and frequent newspaperisation of any quaint confidence extracted by pressure on the poor doll's stomach, of any droll sight of powers set in motion by twitch of whatever string, might serve for a rendering of that ideal. It had reached one's ear again and again from beyond the sea, this inveteracy, as one might almost call it, of the artless ventilation, and mainly in the public prints, of European matter originally gathered in under the supposed law of privilege enjoyed on the one hand and security enjoyed on the other. A hundred good instances confirmed this tradition that nothing in the new world was held accountable to anything in the old, that the hemispheres would have been as dissociated as different planets had n't one of them, by a happy miracle, come in for the comparatively antique right of free fishing in the other.

It was the so oft-attested American sense of the matter that was meanwhile the oddity — the sense on the part of remote adventurous islanders that no custom of give-and-take between their bustling archipelago and the far, the massed continent was thinkable. Strangely enough, none the less, the continent was anecdotically interesting to the islands — though as soon as these were reached all difference between the fruit of the private and the fruit of the public garden naturally dropped. More than all was it striking that the "naturalness" was all of American making — in spite, as had ever seemed to me, of the American tradition to the contrary; the tradition that Europe, much rather, had originally made social commerce unequal. Europe had had quite other matters on her hands; Europe had, into the bargain, on what might n't be newspaperised or otherwise ventilated, quite her own religion and her own practice. This superstition held true of the fruits of curiosity *wherever* socially gathered, whether in bustling archipelagos or in neighbouring kingdoms. It did n't, one felt, immensely signify, all the while; small harm was done, and it was surely rare that any was intended; for supreme, more and more, is the blest truth — sole safety, as it mostly seems, of our distracting age — that a given thing has but

to be newspaperised *enough* (which it may, at our present rate of perfection, in a few hours) to return, as a quick consequence, to the common, the abysmal air and become without form and void. This life of scant seconds, as it were, by the sky-scraping clock, is as good for our sense and measure of the vulgar thing, for keeping apprehension down and keeping immunity up, as no life at all; since in the midst of such preposterous pretensions to recorded or reflected existence what particular vulgarity, what individual blatancy, can prevail? Still over and above all of which, too, we are made aware of a large new direct convenience or resource — the beautiful facility thus rendered the individual mind for what it shall denominate henceforth ignoring in the lump: than which nothing is more likely to work better, I suggest, toward a finer economy of consciousness. For the new beauty is that the lump, the vast concretion of the negligible, is, thanks to prodigious expensive machinery working all *ad hoc*, carefully wrought and prepared for our so dealing with it; to the great saving of our labour of selection, our own not always too beguiled or too sweetened picking-over of the heap.

Our ingenious young friend of the shocked saloons — to finish *her* history — had just simply acted in the tradition; she had figured herself one of the islanders, irresponsible in their very degree, and with a mind as closed to the "coming back" of her disseminated prattle as if it would have had in fact to be wafted from another planet. Thus, as I say, the friendliest initiations offered her among ancient seats had still failed to make her what I have called "aware." Here it was that she became documentary, and that in the flash of some new and accessory light, the continued procession of figures equally fallible, yet as little criminal, her bedimmed precedent shone out for me once more; so that when I got my right and true reference, as I say, for the instance commemorated in "The Reverberator," and which dangled loosely from the peg supplied by the earlier case, this reference was much more directly to the pathetic than to anything else. The Dosson family, here before us, are sunk in their inno-

cence, sunk in their irremediable unawareness almost beyond fishing out. This constituted for handling them, I quite felt, a serious difficulty; they could be too abandoned and pathetic, as the phrase is, to live, and yet be perfectly true; but on the other hand they could be perfectly true and yet too abandoned for vivification, too consentingly feeble to be worth saving. Even this, still, would n't materially limit in them the force of the characteristic — it was exactly in such formless terms that they would speak best for the majority of their congeners; and, in fine, moreover, there was *this* that I absolutely had to save for the love of my subject-matter at large — the special appeal attached to the mild figure of Francina. I need scarcely point out that "round" Francie Dosson the tale is systematically constructed; with which fact was involved for me the clear sense that if I did n't see the Francie Dossons (by whom I mean the general quaint sisterhood, perfectly distinguishable then, but displaced, disfeatured, "discounted" to-day, for all I know) as always and at any cost — at whatever cost of repetition, that is — worth saving, I might as well shut up my international department. For practically — as I have said already more than enough to convey — they were what the American branch of that equation constantly threw me back upon; by reason indeed of a brace of conditions only one of which strictly inhered in the show itself.

In the heavy light of "Europe" thirty or forty years ago, there were more of the Francie Dossons and the Daisy Millers and the Bessie Aldens and the Pandora Days than of all the other attested American objects put together — more of them, of course I mean, from the moment the weird harvester was at all preoccupied with charm, or at all committed to "having to have" it. But quite apart from that truth was always the stiff fact, against which I might have dashed myself in vain, that I had n't the *data* for a right approach to the minor quantities, such as they might have been made out to be. The minor quantities appeared, consistently, but in a single light — that of promiscuous obscure attendance on the Daisies and Bessies and Francies; a generalised

crepuscular state at best, even though yielding little by little a view of dim forms and vague differences. These adumbrations, sufficient tests once applied, claimed identities as fathers, mothers, even sometimes as satellites more directly "engaged"; but there was always, for the author of this record, a prompt and urgent remark to be made about them —which placed him, when all was said, quite at his ease. The men, the non-European, in these queer clusters, the fathers, brothers, playmates, male appendages of whatever presumption, were visible and thinkable only as the American "business-man"; and before the American business-man, as I have been prompt to declare, I was absolutely and irredeemably helpless, with no fibre of my intelligence responding to his mystery. No approach I could make to him on his "business side" really got near it. That is where I was fatally incompetent, and this in turn—the case goes into a nutshell—is so obviously why, for any decent documentation, I was simply shut up to what was left me. It takes but a glance to see how the matter was in such a fashion simplified. With the men wiped out, at a stroke, so far as any grasp of the principle of their activity was concerned (what in the name of goodness did I, or could I, know, to call know, about the very alphabet of their activity?), it was n't the *elder* woman I could take, on any reckoning, as compensatory: her inveterate blankness of surface had a manner all its own of defying the imagination to hover or to hope. There was really, as a rule, nothing whatever to be done with the elder woman; not only were reason and fancy alike forewarned not to waste their time, but any attempt upon her, one somehow felt, would have been indecorous and almost monstrous. She was n't so much as in question; since if one could work it out for the men that the depreciated state with which *they* vaguely and, as it were, somnolently struggled, was perhaps but casual and temporary, might be regarded in fact as the mere state of the medal with its right face accidentally turned down, this redemption never glimmered for the wife and mother, in whom nothing was in eclipse, but everything rather (everything there was at all)

straight in evidence, and to whom therefore any round and complete embodiment had simply been denied.

"A Passionate Pilgrim," written in the year 1870, the earliest date to which anything in the whole present series refers itself, strikes me to-day, and by the same token indescribably touches me, with the two compositions that follow it, as sops instinctively thrown to the international Cerberus formidably posted where I doubtless then did n't quite make him out, yet from whose capacity to loom larger and larger with the years there must already have sprung some chilling portent. Cerberus would have been, thus, to one's younger artistic conscience, the keeper of the international "books"; the hovering disembodied critical spirit with a disengaged eye upon sneaking attempts to substitute the American romantic for the American real. To that comparatively artless category the fiction I have just named, together with "Madame de Mauves" and "The Madonna of the Future," belong. As American as possible, and even to the pitch of fondly coaxing it, I then desired my ground-stuff to remain; so that such situations as are thus offered must have represented my prime view of the telling effect with which the business-man would be dodged. He *is* dodged, here, doubtless, to a charm — he is made to wait as in the furthest and coldest of an infinite perspective of more or less quaint antechambers; where my ingenuous theory of the matter must have been that, artfully trifled with from room to room and from pretext to pretext, he might be kept indefinitely at bay. Thus if a sufficient amount of golden dust were kicked up in the foreground — and I began to kick it, under all these other possible pretexts, as hard as I knew how, he would probably never be able, to my confusion, to break through at all. I had in the spring of 1869, and again in that of 1870, spent several weeks in England, renewing and extending, with infinite zest, an acquaintance with the country that had previously been but an uneffaced little chapter of boyish, or — putting it again far enough back for the dimmest dawn of sensibility — of infantine experience; and had, perceptively and æsthetically speaking, taken the

adventure of my twenty-sixth year "hard," as "A Passionate Pilgrim" quite sufficiently attests.

A part of that adventure had been the never-to-be-forgotten thrill of a first sight of Italy, from late in the summer of 1869 on; so that a return to America at the beginning of the following year was to drag with it, as a lengthening chain, the torment of losses and regrets. The repatriated victim of that unrest was, beyond doubt, acutely conscious of his case: the fifteen months just spent in Europe had absolutely determined his situation. The nostalgic poison had been distilled for him, the future presented to him but as a single intense question: was he to spend it in brooding exile, or might he somehow come into his "own"? — as I liked betimes to put it for a romantic analogy with the state of dispossessed princes and wandering heirs. The question was to answer itself promptly enough — yet after a delay sufficient to give me the measure of a whole previous relation to it. I had from as far back as I could remember carried in my side, buried and unextracted, the head of one of those well-directed shafts from the European quiver to which, of old, tender American flesh was more helplessly and bleedingly exposed, I think, than to-day: the nostalgic cup had been applied to my lips even before I was conscious of it — I had been hurried off to London and to Paris immediately after my birth, and then and there, I was ever afterwards strangely to feel, that poison had entered my veins. This was so much the case that when again, in my thirteenth year, re-exposure was decreed, and was made effective and prolonged, my inward sense of it was, in the oddest way, not of my finding myself in the vague and the uncharted, but much rather restored to air already breathed and to a harmony already disclosed. The unnatural precocity with which I had in fine "taken" to Europe was to be revealed to me later on and during another quite languishing American interval; an interval during which I supposed my young life to have been made bitter, under whatever appearances of smug accommodation, by too prompt a mouthful — recklessly administered to one's helplessness by responsible

hands — of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Why otherwise so queer a taste, always, in so juvenile, so *generally* gaping, a mouth? Well, the queer taste doubtless had been there, but the point of my anecdote, with my brace of infatuated "short stories" for its occasion, is in the infinitely greater queerness it was to take on between the summer of '70 and that of '72, when it set me again in motion.

As I read over "A Passionate Pilgrim" and "The Madonna of the Future" they become in the highest degree documentary for myself — from all measure of such interest as they may possibly have at this time of day for others I stand off; though I disengage from them but one thing, their betrayal of their consolatory use. The deep beguilement of the lost vision recovered, in comparative indigence, by a certain inexpert intensity of art — the service rendered by them at need, with whatever awkwardness and difficulty — sticks out of them for me to the exclusion of everything else and consecrates them, I freely admit, to memory. "Madame de Mauves" and "Louisa Pallant" are another matter; the latter, in especial, belongs to recent years. The former is of the small group of my productions yielding to present research no dimmest responsive ghost of a traceable origin. These remarks have constituted to excess perhaps the record of what may have put this, that and the other treated idea into my head; but I am quite unable to say what, in the summer of 1873, may have put "Madame de Mauves." Save for a single pleasant image, and for the fact that, dispatched to New York, the tale appeared, early in the following year, in "The Galaxy," a periodical to which I find, with this, twenty other remembrances gratefully attached, not a glimmer of attendant reference survives. I recall the tolerably wide court of an old inn at Bad-Homburg in the Taunus hills — a dejected and forlorn little place (its *seconde jeunesse* not yet in sight) during the years immediately following the Franco-Prussian war, which had overturned, with that of Baden-Baden, its altar, the well-appointed worship of the great goddess Chance — a homely enclosure on the ground-level of which I occupied a dampish, dusky, unsunned room, cool,

however, to the relief of the fevered muse, during some very hot weather. The place was so dark that I could see my way to and from my inkstand, I remember, but by keeping the door to the court open — thanks to which also the muse, witness of many mild domestic incidents, was distracted and beguiled. In this retreat I was visited by the gentle Euphemia; I sat in crepuscular comfort pouring forth again, and, no doubt, artfully editing, the confidences with which she honoured me. She again, after her fashion, was what I might have called experimentally international; she muffled her charming head in the lightest, finest, vaguest tissue of romance and put twenty questions by. "Louisa Pallant," with still subtler art, I find, completely covers her tracks — her repudiation of every ray of legend being the more marked by the later date (1888) of her appearance. Charitably affected to her and thus disposed, if the term be not arrogant, to hand her down, I yet win from her no shadow of an intelligible account of herself. I had taken possession, at Florence, during the previous year, of a couple of sunny rooms on the Arno just at the point where the Borg' Ognissanti begins to bore duskily westward; and in those cheerful chambers (where the pitch of brightness differed so from that of the others just commemorated) I seem to have found my subject seated in extreme assurance. I did my best for it one February while the light and the colour and the sound of old Italy played in again through my open windows and about my patient table after the bold loud fashion that I had had, from so much before, to teach myself to think directly auspicious when it might be, and indirectly when it might n't.

HENRY JAMES.

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THE REVERBERATOR

THE REVERBERATOR

I

"I GUESS my daughter's in here," the old man said, leading the way into the little *salon de lecture*. He was not of the most advanced age, but that is the way George Flack considered him, and indeed he looked older than he was. George Flack had found him sitting in the court of the hotel — he sat a great deal in the court of the hotel — and had gone up to him with characteristic directness and asked him for Miss Francina. Poor Mr. Dosson had with the greatest docility disposed himself to wait on the young man: he had as a matter of course risen and made his way across the court to announce to his child that she had a visitor. He looked submissive, almost servile, as he preceded the visitor, thrusting his head forward in his quest; but it was not in Mr. Flack's line to notice that sort of thing. He accepted the old gentleman's good offices as he would have accepted those of a waiter, conveying no hint of an attention paid also to himself. An observer of these two persons would have assured himself that the degree to which Mr. Dosson thought it natural any one should want to see his daughter was only equalled by the degree to which the young man thought it natural her father should take trouble to produce her. There was a superfluous drapery in the doorway of the *salon de lecture*, which

Mr. Dosson pushed aside while George Flack stepped in after him.

The reading-room of the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham was none too ample, and had seemed to Mr. Dosson from the first to consist principally of a highly-polished floor on the bareness of which it was easy for a relaxed elderly American to slip. It was composed further, to his perception, of a table with a green velvet cloth, of a fireplace with a great deal of fringe and no fire, of a window with a great deal of curtain and no light, and of the *Figaro*, which he could n't read, and the New York *Herald*, which he had already read. A single person was just now in possession of these conveniences — a young lady who sat with her back to the window, looking straight before her into the conventional room. She was dressed as for the street; her empty hands rested upon the arms of her chair — she had withdrawn her long gloves, which were lying in her lap — and she seemed to be doing nothing as hard as she could. Her face was so much in shadow as to be barely distinguishable; nevertheless the young man had a disappointed cry as soon as he saw her. "Why, it ain't Miss Francie — it's Miss Delia!"

"Well, I guess we can fix that," said Mr. Dosson, wandering further into the room and drawing his feet over the floor without lifting them. Whatever he did he ever seemed to wander: he had an impermanent transitory air, an aspect of weary yet patient non-arrival, even when he sat, as he was capable of sitting for hours, in the court of the inn. As he glanced down at the two newspapers in their desert of green velvet

he raised a hopeless uninterested glass to his eye. "Delia dear, where's your little sister?"

Delia made no movement whatever, nor did any expression, so far as could be perceived, pass over her large young face. She only ejaculated: "Why, Mr. Flack, where did you drop from?"

"Well, this is a good place to meet," her father remarked, as if mildly, and as a mere passing suggestion, to deprecate explanations.

"Any place is good where one meets old friends," said George Flack, looking also at the newspapers. He examined the date of the American sheet and then put it down. "Well, how do you like Paris?" he subsequently went on to the young lady.

"We quite enjoy it; but of course we're familiar now."

"Well, I was in hopes I could show you something," Mr. Flack said.

"I guess they've seen most everything," Mr. Dosson observed.

"Well, we've seen more than you!" exclaimed his daughter.

"Well, I've seen a good deal — just sitting there."

A person with delicate ear might have suspected Mr. Dosson of a tendency to "setting"; but he would pronounce the same word in a different manner at different times.

"Well, in Paris you can see everything," said the young man. "I'm quite enthusiastic about Paris."

"Have n't you been here before?" Miss Delia asked.

"Oh yes, but it's ever fresh. And how is Miss Francie?"

"She's all right. She has gone upstairs to get something. I guess we're going out again."

"It's very attractive for the young," Mr. Dosson pleaded to the visitor.

"Well then, I'm one of the young. Do you mind if I go with you?" Mr. Flack continued to the girl.

"It'll seem like old times, on the deck," she replied. "We're going to the Bon Marché."

"Why don't you go to the Louvre? That's the place for *you*."

"We've just come from there: we've had quite a morning."

"Well, it's a good place," the visitor a trifle dryly opined.

"It's good for some things but it does n't come up to my idea for others."

"Oh they've seen everything," said Mr. Dosson. Then he added: "I guess I'll go and call Francie."

"Well, tell her to hurry," Miss Delia returned, swinging a glove in each hand.

"She knows my pace," Mr. Flack remarked.

"I should think she would, the way you raced!" the girl returned with memories of the Umbria. "I hope you don't expect to rush round Paris that way."

"I always rush. I live in a rush. That's the way to get through."

"Well, I *am* through, I guess," said Mr. Dosson philosophically.

"Well, I ain't!" his daughter declared with decision.

"Well, you must come round often," he continued to their friend as a leave-taking.

"Oh, I'll come round! I'll have to rush, but I'll do it."

"I'll send down Francie." And Francie's father crept away.

"And please give her some more money!" her sister called after him.

"Does she keep the money?" George Flack enquired.

"*Keep* it?" Mr. Dosson stopped as he pushed aside the portière. "Oh you innocent young man!"

"I guess it's the first time you were ever called innocent!" cried Delia, left alone with the visitor.

"Well, I *was* — before I came to Paris."

"Well, I can't see that it has hurt *us*. We ain't a speck extravagant."

"Would n't you have a right to be?"

"I don't think any one has a right to be," Miss Dosson returned incorruptibly.

The young man, who had seated himself, looked at her a moment. "That's the way you used to talk."

"Well, I have n't changed."

"And Miss Francie — has she?"

"Well, you'll see," said Delia Dosson, beginning to draw on her gloves.

Her companion watched her, leaning forward with his elbows on the arms of his chair and his hands interlocked. At last he said interrogatively: "Bon Marché?"

"No, I got them in a little place I know."

"Well, they're Paris anyway."

"Of course they're Paris. But you can get gloves anywhere."

"You must show me the little place anyhow," Mr. Flack continued sociably. And he observed further and with the same friendliness: "The old gentleman seems all there."

"Oh he's the dearest of the dear."

"He's a real gentleman — of the old stamp," said George Flack.

"Well, what should you think our father would be?"

"I should think he'd be delighted!"

"Well, he is, when we carry out our plans."

"And what are they — your plans?" asked the young man.

"Oh I never tell them."

"How then does he know whether you carry them out?"

"Well, I guess he'd know it if we did n't," said the girl.

"I remember how secretive you were last year. You kept everything to yourself."

"Well, I know what I want," the young lady pursued.

He watched her button one of her gloves deftly, using a hairpin released from some mysterious office under her bonnet. There was a moment's silence, after which they looked up at each other. "I've an idea you don't want me," said George Flack.

"Oh yes, I do — as a friend."

"Of all the mean ways of trying to get rid of a man that's the meanest!" he rang out.

"Where's the meanness when I suppose you're not so ridiculous as to wish to be anything more!"

"More to your sister, do you mean — or to yourself?"

"My sister *is* myself — I have n't got any other," said Delia Dosson.

"Any other sister?"

"Don't be idiotic. Are you still in the same business?" the girl went on.

"Well, I forget which one I *was* in."

"Why, something to do with that newspaper — don't you remember?"

"Yes, but it is n't that paper any more — it's a different one."

"Do you go round for news — in the same way?"

"Well, I try to get the people what they want. It's hard work," said the young man.

"Well, I suppose if you did n't some one else would. They will have it, won't they?"

"Yes, they will have it." The wants of the people, however, appeared at the present moment to interest Mr. Flack less than his own. He looked at his watch and remarked that the old gentleman did n't seem to have much authority.

"What do you mean by that?" the girl asked.

"Why with Miss Francie. She's taking her time, or rather, I mean, she's taking mine."

"Well, if you expect to do anything with her you must give her plenty of that," Delia returned.

"All right: I'll give her all I have." And Miss Dosson's interlocutor leaned back in his chair with folded arms, as to signify how much, if it came to that, she might have to count with his patience. But she sat there easy and empty, giving no sign and fear-

ing no future. He was the first indeed to turn again to restlessness: at the end of a few moments he asked the young lady if she did n't suppose her father had told her sister who it was.

"Do you think that's all that's required?" she made answer with cold gaiety. But she added more familiarly: "Probably that's the reason. She's so shy."

"Oh yes — she used to look it."

"No, that's her peculiarity, that she never looks it and yet suffers everything."

"Well, you make it up for her then, Miss Delia," the young man ventured to declare. "You don't suffer much."

"No, for Francie I'm all there. I guess I could act for her."

He had a pause. "You act for her too much. If it was n't for you I think I could do something."

"Well, you've got to kill me first!" Delia Dosson replied.

"I'll come down on you somehow in the *Reverberator*," he went on.

But the threat left her calm. "Oh that's not what the people want."

"No, unfortunately they don't care anything about *my* affairs."

"Well, we do: we're kinder than most, Francie and I," said the girl. "But we desire to keep your affairs quite distinct from ours."

"Oh yours — yours: if I could only discover what they are!" cried George Flack. And during the rest of the time that they waited the young journalist tried

to find out. If an observer had chanced to be present for the quarter of an hour that elapsed, and had had any attention to give to these vulgar young persons, he would have wondered perhaps at there being so much mystery on one side and so much curiosity on the other — wondered at least at the elaboration of inscrutable projects on the part of a girl who looked to the casual eye as if she were stolidly passive. Fidelia Dosson, whose name had been shortened, was twenty-five years old and had a large white face, in which the eyes were far apart. Her forehead was high but her mouth was small, her hair was light and colourless and a certain inelegant thickness of figure made her appear shorter than she was. Elegance indeed had not been her natural portion, and the Bon Marché and other establishments had to make up for that. To a casual sister's eye they would scarce have appeared to have acquitted themselves of their office, but even a woman would n't have guessed how little Fidelia cared. She always looked the same; all the contrivances of Paris could n't fill out that blank, and she held them, for herself, in no manner of esteem. It was a plain clean round pattern face, marked for recognition among so many only perhaps by a small figure, the sprig on a china plate, that might have denoted deep obstinacy; and yet, with its settled smoothness, it was neither stupid nor hard. It was as calm as a room kept dusted and aired for candid earnest occasions, the meeting of unanimous committees and the discussion of flourishing businesses. If she had been a young man — and she had a little the head of one — it would probably have been

thought of her that she was likely to become a Doctor or a Judge.

An observer would have gathered, further, that Mr. Flack's acquaintance with Mr. Dosson and his daughters had had its origin in his crossing the Atlantic eastward in their company more than a year before, and in some slight association immediately after disembarking, but that each party had come and gone a good deal since then — come and gone however without meeting again. It was to be inferred that in this interval Miss Dosson had led her father and sister back to their native land and had then a second time directed their course to Europe. This was a new departure, said Mr. Flack, or rather a new arrival: he understood that it was n't, as he called it, the same old visit. She did n't repudiate the accusation, launched by her companion as if it might have been embarrassing, of having spent her time at home in Boston, and even in a suburban quarter of it: she confessed that as Bostonians they had been capable of that. But now they had come abroad for longer — ever so much: what they had gone home for was to make arrangements for a European stay of which the limits were not to be told. So far as this particular future opened out to her she freely acknowledged it. It appeared to meet with George Flack's approval — he also had a big undertaking on that side and it might require years, so that it would be pleasant to have his friends right there. He knew his way round in Paris — or any place like that — much better than round Boston; if they had been poked away in one of those clever suburbs they would have been lost to him.

"Oh well, you'll see as much as you want of us — the way you'll have to take us," Delia Dosson said: which led the young man to ask what way that was and to guess he had never known but one way to take anything — which was just as it came. "Oh well, you'll see what you'll make of it," the girl returned; and she would give for the present no further explanation of her somewhat chilling speech. In spite of it however she professed an interest in Mr. Flack's announced undertaking — an interest springing apparently from an interest in the personage himself. The man of wonderments and measurements we have smuggled into the scene would have gathered that Miss Dosson's attention was founded on a conception of Mr. Flack's intrinsic brilliancy. Would his own impression have justified that? — would he have found such a conception contagious? I forbear to ridicule the thought, for that would saddle me with the care of showing what right our officious observer might have had to his particular standard. Let us therefore simply note that George Flack had grounds for looming publicly large to an uninformed young woman. He was connected, as she supposed, with literature, and was n't a sympathy with literature one of the many engaging attributes of her so generally attractive little sister? If Mr. Flack was a writer Francie was a reader: had n't a trail of forgotten Tauchnitzes marked the former line of travel of the party of three? The elder girl grabbed at them on leaving hotels and railway-carriages, but usually found that she had brought odd volumes. She considered however that as a family they had an intellectual

link with the young journalist, and would have been surprised if she had heard the advantage of his acquaintance questioned.

Mr. Flack's appearance was not so much a property of his own as a prejudice or a fixed liability of those who looked at him: whoever they might be what they saw mainly in him was that they had seen him before. And, oddly enough, this recognition carried with it in general no ability to remember — that is to recall — him: you could n't conveniently have prefigured him, and it was only when you were conscious of him that you knew you had already somehow paid for it. To carry him in your mind you must have liked him very much, for no other sentiment, not even aversion, would have taught you what distinguished him in his group: aversion in especial would have made you aware only of what confounded him. He was not a specific person, but had beyond even Delia Dosson, in whom we have facially noted it, the quality of the sample or advertisement, the air of representing a "line of goods" for which there is a steady popular demand. You would scarce have expected him to be individually designated: a number, like that of the day's newspaper, would have served all his, or at least all your, purpose, and you would have vaguely supposed the number high — somewhere up in the millions. As every copy of the newspaper answers to its name, Miss Dosson's visitor would have been quite adequately marked as "young commercial American." Let me add that among the accidents of his appearance was that of its sometimes striking other young commercial Americans as fine. He was twenty-

seven years old and had a small square head, a light grey overcoat and in his right forefinger a curious natural crook which might have availed, under pressure, to identify him. But for the convenience of society he ought always to have worn something conspicuous — a green hat or a yellow necktie. His undertaking was to obtain material in Europe for an American "society-paper."

If it be objected to all this that when Francie Dosson at last came in she addressed him as if she easily placed him, the answer is that she had been notified by her father — and more punctually than was indicated by the manner of her response. "Well, the way you *do* turn up," she said, smiling and holding out her left hand to him: in the other hand, or the hollow of her slim right arm, she had a lumpish parcel. Though she had made him wait she was clearly very glad to see him there; and she as evidently required and enjoyed a great deal of that sort of indulgence. Her sister's attitude would have told you so even if her own appearance had not. There was that in her manner to the young man — a perceptible but indefinable shade — which seemed to legitimate the oddity of his having asked in particular for her, asked as if he wished to see her to the exclusion of her father and sister: the note of a special pleasure which might have implied a special relation. And yet a spectator looking from Mr. George Flack to Miss Francie Dosson would have been much at a loss to guess what special relation could exist between them. The girl was exceedingly, extraordinarily pretty, all exempt from traceable likeness to her sister; and there was a bright-

ness in her — a still and scattered radiance — which was quite distinct from what is called animation. Rather tall than short, fine slender erect, with an airy lightness of hand and foot, she yet gave no impression of quick movement, of abundant chatter, of excitable nerves and irrepressible life — no hint of arriving at her typical American grace in the most usual way. She was pretty without emphasis and as might almost have been said without point, and your fancy that a little stiffness would have improved her was at once qualified by the question of what her softness would have made of it. There was nothing in her, however, to confirm the implication that she had rushed about the deck of a Cunarder with a newspaper-man. She was as straight as a wand and as true as a gem; her neck was long and her grey eyes had colour; and from the ripple of her dark brown hair to the curve of her unaffirmative chin every line in her face was happy and pure. She had a weak pipe of a voice and inconceivabilities of ignorance.

Delia got up, and they came out of the little reading-room — this young lady remarking to her sister that she hoped she had brought down all the things. "Well, I had a fiendish hunt for them — we've got so many," Francie replied with a strange want of articulation. "There were a few dozens of the pocket-handkerchiefs I could n't find; but I guess I've got most of them and most of the gloves."

"Well, what are you carting them about for?" George Flack enquired, taking the parcel from her. "You had better let me handle them. Do you buy pocket-handkerchiefs by the hundred?"

"Well, it only makes fifty apiece," Francie yieldingly smiled. "They ain't really nice — we're going to change them."

"Oh I won't be mixed up with that — you can't work that game on these Frenchmen!" the young man stated.

"Oh with Francie they'll take anything back," Delia Dosson declared. "They just love her, all over."

"Well, they're like me then," said Mr. Flack with friendly cheer. "*I'll* take her back if she'll come."

"Well, I don't think I'm ready quite yet," the girl replied. "But I hope very much we shall cross with you again."

"Talk about crossing — it's on these boulevards we want a life-preserver!" Delia loudly commented. They had passed out of the hotel and the wide vista of the Rue de la Paix stretched up and down. There were many vehicles.

"Won't this thing do? I'll tie it to either of you," George Flack said, holding out his bundle. "I suppose they won't kill you if they love you," he went on to the object of his preference.

"Well, you've got to know me first," she answered, laughing and looking for a chance, while they waited to pass over.

"I did n't know you when I was struck." He applied his disengaged hand to her elbow and propelled her across the street. She took no notice of his observation, and Delia asked her, on the other side, whether their father had given her that money. She replied that he had given her loads — she felt as if he had

made his will; which led George Flack to say that he wished the old gentleman was *his* father.

"Why you don't mean to say you want to be our brother!" Francie prattled as they went down the Rue de la Paix.

"I should like to be Miss Delia's, if you can make that out," he laughed.

"Well then suppose you prove it by calling me a cab," Miss Delia returned. "I presume you and Francie don't take this for a promenade-deck."

"Don't she feel rich?" George Flack demanded of Francie. "But we do require a cart for our goods"; and he hailed a little yellow carriage, which presently drew up beside the pavement. The three got into it and, still emitting innocent pleasantries, proceeded on their way, while at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham Mr. Dosson wandered down into the court again and took his place in his customary chair.

II

The court was roofed with glass; the April air was mild; the cry of women selling violets came in from the street and, mingling with the rich hum of Paris, seemed to bring with it faintly the odour of the flowers. There were other odours in the place, warm succulent and Parisian, which ranged from fried fish to burnt sugar; and there were many things besides: little tables for the post-prandial coffee; piles of luggage inscribed (after the initials or frequently the name) R. P. Scudamore or D. Jackson Hodge, Philadelphia Pa., or St. Louis Mo.; rattles of unregarded bells, flittings of tray-bearing waiters, conversations with the second-floor windows of admonitory landladies, arrivals of young women with coffinlike bandboxes covered with black oil-cloth and depending from a strap, sallyings-forth of persons staying and arrivals just afterwards of other persons to see them; together with vague prostrations on benches of tired heads of American families. It was to this last element that Mr. Dosson himself in some degree contributed, but it must be added that he had not the extremely bereft and exhausted appearance of certain of his fellows. There was an air of ruminant resignation, of habitual accommodation in him; but you would have guessed that he was enjoying a holiday rather than aching for a truce, and he was not so enfeebled but that he was able to get up from time to

time and stroll through the *porte cochère* to have a look at the street.

He gazed up and down for five minutes with his hands in his pockets, and then came back; that appeared to content him; he asked for little and had no restlessness that these small excursions would n't assuage. He looked at the heaped-up luggage, at the tinkling bells, at the young women from the *lingere*, at the repudiated visitors, at everything but the other American parents. Something in his breast told him that he knew all about these. It 's not upon each other that the animals in the same cage, in a zoölogical collection, most turn their eyes. There was a silent sociability in him and a superficial fineness of grain that helped to account for his daughter Francie's various delicacies. He was fair and spare and had no figure; you would have seen in a moment that the question of how he should hold himself had never in his life occurred to him. He never held himself at all; providence held him rather — and very loosely — by an invisible string at the end of which he seemed gently to dangle and waver. His face was so smooth that his thin light whiskers, which grew only far back, scarcely seemed native to his cheeks: they might have been attached there for some harmless purpose of comedy or disguise. He looked for the most part as if he were thinking over, without exactly understanding it, something rather droll that had just occurred; if his eyes wandered his attention rested, just as it hurried, quite as little. His feet were remarkably small, and his clothes, in which light colours predominated, were visibly the work of a French tailor:

he was an American who still held the tradition that it is in Paris a man dresses himself best. His hat would have looked odd in Bond Street or the Fifth Avenue, and his necktie was loose and flowing.

Mr. Dosson, it may further be noted, was a person of the simplest composition, a character as cipherable as a sum of two figures. He had a native financial faculty of the finest order, a gift as direct as a beautiful tenor voice, which had enabled him, without the aid of particular strength of will or keenness of ambition, to build up a large fortune while he was still of middle age. He had a genius for happy speculation, the quick unerring instinct of a "good thing"; and as he sat there idle amused contented, on the edge of the Parisian street, he might very well have passed for some rare performer who had sung his song or played his trick and had nothing to do till the next call. And he had grown rich not because he was ravenous or hard, but simply because he had an ear, not to term it a nose. He could make out the tune in the discord of the market-place; he could smell success far up the wind. The second factor in his little addition was that he was an unassuming father. He had no tastes, no acquirements, no curiosities, and his daughters represented all society for him. He thought much more and much oftener of these young ladies than of his bank-shares and railway-stock; they crowned much more his sense of accumulated property. He never compared them with other girls; he only compared his present self with what he would have been without them. His view of them was perfectly simple. Delia had a greater direct knowledge of life and

Francie a wider acquaintance with literature and art. Mr. Dosson had not perhaps a full perception of his younger daughter's beauty: he would scarcely have pretended to judge of that, more than he would of a valuable picture or vase, but he believed she was cultivated up to the eyes. He had a recollection of tremendous school-bills and, in later days, during their travels, of the way she was always leaving books behind her. Moreover was n't her French so good that he could n't understand it?

The two girls, at any rate, formed the breeze in his sail and the only directing determinant force he knew; when anything happened — and he was under the impression that things *did* happen — they were there for it to have happened *to*. Without them in short, as he felt, he would have been the tail without the kite. The wind rose and fell of course; there were lulls and there were gales; there were intervals during which he simply floated in quiet waters — cast anchor and waited. This appeared to be one of them now; but he could be patient, knowing that he should soon again inhale the brine and feel the dip of his prow. When his daughters were out for any time the occasion affected him as a "weather-breeder" — the wind would be then, as a kind of consequence, *going* to rise; but their now being out with a remarkably bright young man only sweetened the temporary calm. That belonged to their superior life, and Mr. Dosson never doubted that George M. Flack was remarkably bright. He represented the newspaper, and the newspaper for this man of genial assumptions represented — well, all other representations whatever. To know

Delia and Francie thus attended by an editor or a correspondent was really to see them dancing in the central glow. This is doubtless why Mr. Dosson had slightly more than usual his air of recovering slowly from a pleasant surprise. The vision to which I allude hung before him, at a convenient distance, and melted into other bright confused aspects: reminiscences of Mr. Flack in other relations — on the ship, on the deck, at the hotel at Liverpool, and in the cars. Whitney Dosson was a loyal father, but he would have thought himself simple had he not had two or three strong convictions: one of which was that the children should never go out with a gentleman they had n't seen before. The sense of their having, and his having, seen Mr. Flack before was comfortable to him now: it made mere placidity of his personally foregoing the young man's society in favour of Delia and Francie. He had not hitherto been perfectly satisfied that the streets and shops, the general immensity of Paris, were just the safest place for young ladies alone. But the company of a helpful gentleman ensured safety — a gentleman who would be helpful by the fact of his knowing so much and having it all right there. If a big newspaper told you everything there was in the world every morning, that was what a big newspaper-man would have to know, and Mr. Dosson had never supposed there was anything left to know when such voices as Mr. Flack's and that of his organ had daily been heard. In the absence of such happy chances — and in one way or another they kept occurring — his girls might have seemed lonely, which was not the way he struck himself. They were his company but

he scarcely theirs; it was as if they belonged to him more than he to them.

They were out a long time, but he felt no anxiety, as he reflected that Mr. Flack's very profession would somehow make everything turn out to their profit. The bright French afternoon waned without bringing them back, yet Mr. Dosson still revolved about the court till he might have been taken for a *valet de place* hoping to pick up custom. The landlady smiled at him sometimes as she passed and re-passed, and even ventured to remark disinterestedly that it was a pity to waste such a lovely day indoors — not to take a turn and see what was going on in Paris. But Mr. Dosson had no sense of waste: that came to him much more when he was confronted with historical monuments or beauties of nature or art, which affected him as the talk of people naming others, naming friends of theirs, whom he had never heard of: then he was aware of a degree of waste for the others, as if somebody lost something — but never when he lounged in that simplifying yet so comprehensive way in the court. It wanted but a quarter of an hour to dinner — *that* historic fact was not beyond his measure — when Delia and Francie at last met his view, still accompanied by Mr. Flack and sauntering in, at a little distance from each other, with a jaded air which was not in the least a tribute to his possible solicitude. They dropped into chairs and joked with each other, mingling sociability and languor, on the subject of what they had seen and done — a question into which he felt as yet the delicacy of enquiring. But they had evidently done a good deal and had a

good time: an impression sufficient to rescue Mr. Dosson personally from the consciousness of failure.

"Won't you just step in and take dinner with us?" he asked of the young man with a friendliness to which everything appeared to minister.

"Well, that's a handsome offer," George Flack replied while Delia put it on record that they had each eaten about thirty cakes.

"Well, I wondered what you were doing so long. But never mind your cakes. It's twenty minutes past six, and the *table d'hôte* 's on time."

"You don't mean to say you dine at the *table d'hôte!*" Mr. Flack cried.

"Why, don't you like that?" — and Francie's candour of appeal to their comrade's taste was celestial.

"Well, it is n't what you must build on when you come to Paris. Too many flowerpots and chickens' legs."

"Well, would you like one of these restaurants?" asked Mr. Dosson. "*I* don't care — if you show us a good one."

"Oh I'll show you a good one — don't you worry." Mr. Flack's tone was ever that of keeping the poor gentleman mildly but firmly in his place.

"Well, you've got to order the dinner then," said Francie.

"Well, you'll see how I could do it!" He towered over her in the pride of this feat.

"He has got an interest in some place," Delia declared. "He has taken us to ever so many stores where he gets his commission."

"Well, I'd pay you to take them round," said Mr.

Dosson; and with much agreeable trifling of this kind it was agreed that they should sally forth for the evening meal under Mr. Flack's guidance.

If he had easily convinced them on this occasion that that was a more original proceeding than worrying those old bones, as he called it, at the hotel, he convinced them of other things besides in the course of the following month and by the aid of profuse attentions. What he mainly made clear to them was that it was really most kind of a young man who had so many big things on his mind to find sympathy for questions, for issues, he used to call them, that could occupy the telegraph and the press so little as theirs. He came every day to set them in the right path, pointing out its charms to them in a way that made them feel how much they had been in the wrong. It made them feel indeed that they did n't know anything about anything, even about such a matter as ordering shoes — an art in which they had vaguely supposed themselves rather strong. He had in fact great knowledge, which was wonderfully various, and he knew as many people as they knew few. He had appointments — very often with celebrities — for every hour of the day, and memoranda, sometimes in shorthand, on tablets with elastic straps, with which he dazzled the simple folk at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham, whose social life, of narrow range, consisted mainly in reading the lists of Americans who "registered" at the bankers' and at Galignani's. Delia Dosson in particular had a trick of poring solemnly over these records which exasperated Mr. Flack, who skimmed them and found what he wanted in the flash

of an eye: she kept the others waiting while she satisfied herself that Mr. and Mrs. D. S. Rosenheim and Miss Cora Rosenheim and Master Samuel Rosenheim had "left for Brussels."

Mr. Flack was wonderful on all occasions in finding what he wanted — which, as we know, was what he believed the public wanted — and Delia was the only one of the party with whom he was sometimes a little sharp. He had embraced from the first the idea that she was his enemy, and he alluded to it with almost tiresome frequency, though always in a humorous fearless strain. Even more than by her fashion of hanging over the registers she provoked him by appearing to find their little party not sufficient to itself, by wishing, as he expressed it, to work in new stuff. He might have been easy, however, for he had sufficient chance to observe how it was always the fate of the Dossons to miss their friends. They were continually looking out for reunions and combinations that never came off, hearing that people had been in Paris only after they had gone away, or feeling convinced that they were there but not to be found through their not having registered, or wondering whether they should overtake them if they should go to Dresden, and then making up their minds to start for Dresden only to learn at the eleventh hour, through some accident, that the hunted game had "left for" Biarritz even as the Rosenheims for Brussels. "We know plenty of people if we could only come across them," Delia had more than once observed: she scanned the Continent with a wondering baffled gaze and talked of the unsatisfactory way in which friends at home would

"write out" that other friends were "somewhere in Europe." She expressed the wish that such correspondents as that might be in a place that was not at all vague. Two or three times people had called at the hotel when they were out and had left cards for them without an address and superscribed with some mocking dash of the pencil — "So sorry to miss you!" or "Off to-morrow!" The girl sat looking at these cards, handling them and turning them over for a quarter of an hour at a time; she produced them days afterwards, brooding upon them afresh as if they were a mystic clue. George Flack generally knew where they were, the people who were "somewhere in Europe." Such knowledge came to him by a kind of intuition, by the voices of the air, by indefinable and unteachable processes. But he held his peace on purpose; he did n't want any outsiders; he thought their little party just right. Mr. Dosson's place in the scheme of Providence was to "go" with Delia while he himself "went" with Francie, and nothing would have induced George Flack to disfigure that equation.

The young man was professionally so occupied with other people's affairs that it should doubtless be mentioned to his praise that he still managed to have affairs — or at least an affair — of his own. That affair was Francie Dosson, and he was pleased to perceive how little *she* cared what had become of Mr. and Mrs. Rosenheim and Master Samuel and Miss Cora. He counted all the things she did n't care about — her soft inadvertent eyes helped him to do that; and they footed up so, as he would have said, that they gave him the rich sense of a free

field. If she had so few interests there was the greater possibility that a young man of bold conceptions and cheerful manners might become one. She had usually the air of waiting for something, with a pretty listlessness or an amused resignation, while tender shy indefinite little fancies hummed in her brain. Thus she would perhaps recognise in him the reward of patience. George Flack was aware that he exposed his friends to considerable fatigue: he brought them back pale and taciturn from suburban excursions and from wanderings often rather aimless and casual among the boulevards and avenues of the town. He regarded them at such times with complacency however, for these were hours of diminished resistance: he had an idea that he should be able eventually to circumvent Delia if he only could catch her some day sufficiently, that is physically, prostrate. He liked to make them all feel helpless and dependent, and this was not difficult with people who were so modest and artless, so unconscious of the boundless power of wealth. Sentiment, in our young man, was not a scruple nor a source of weakness; but he thought it really touching, the little these good people knew of what they could do with their money. They had in their hands a weapon of infinite range and yet were incapable of firing a shot for themselves. They had a sort of social humility; it appeared never to have occurred to them that, added to their loveliness, their money gave them a value. This used to strike George Flack on certain occasions when he came back to find them in the places where he had dropped them while he rushed off to give a turn to one of his screws.

They never played him false, never wearied of waiting; always sat patient and submissive, usually at a café to which he had introduced them or in a row of chairs on the boulevard, on the level expanse of the Tuileries or in the Champs Elysées.

He introduced them to many cafés, in different parts of Paris, being careful to choose those which in his view young ladies might frequent with propriety, and there were two or three in the neighbourhood of their hotel where they became frequent and familiar figures. As the late spring days grew warmer and brighter they mainly camped out on the "terrace," amid the array of small tables at the door of the establishment, where Mr. Flack, on the return, could descry them from afar at their post and in the very same postures to which he had appointed them. They complained of no satiety in watching the many-coloured movement of the Parisian streets; and if some of the features in the panorama were base they were only so in a version that the social culture of our friends was incapable of supplying. George Flack considered that he was rendering a positive service to Mr. Dosson: would n't the old gentleman have sat all day in the court anyway? and was n't the boulevard better than the court? It was his theory too that he flattered and caressed Miss Francie's father, for there was no one to whom he had furnished more copious details about the affairs, the projects and prospects, of the *Reverberator*. He had left no doubt in the old gentleman's mind as to the race he himself intended to run, and Mr. Dosson used to say to him every day, the first thing, "Well, where have you got to now?" — quite

as if he took a real interest. George Flack reported his interviews, that is his reportings, to which Delia and Francie gave attention only in case they knew something of the persons on whom the young emissary of the *Reverberator* had conferred this distinction; whereas Mr. Dosson listened, with his tolerant interposition of "Is that so?" and "Well, that's good," just as submissively when he heard of the celebrity in question for the first time.

In conversation with his daughters Mr. Flack was frequently the theme, though introduced much more by the young ladies than by himself, and especially by Delia, who announced at an early period that she knew what he wanted and that it was n't in the least what *she* wanted. She amplified this statement very soon — at least as regards her interpretation of Mr. Flack's designs: a certain mystery still hung about her own, which, as she intimated, had much more to recommend them. Delia's vision of the danger as well as the advantage of being a pretty girl was closely connected, as was natural, with the idea of an "engagement": this idea was in a manner complete in itself — her imagination failed in the oddest way to carry it into the next stage. She wanted her sister to be engaged but wanted her not at all to be married, and had clearly never made up her mind as to how Francie was to enjoy both the peril and the shelter. It was a secret source of humiliation to her that there had as yet to her knowledge been no one with whom her sister had exchanged vows; if her conviction on this subject could have expressed itself intelligibly it would have given you a glimpse of a droll

state of mind — a dim theory that a bright girl ought to be able to try successive aspirants. Delia's conception of what such a trial might consist of was strangely innocent: it was made up of calls and walks and buggy-drives, and above all of being, in the light of these exhibitions, the theme of tongues and subject to the great imputation. It had never in life occurred to her withal that a succession of lovers, or just even a repetition of experiments, may have anything to say to a young lady's delicacy. She felt herself a born old maid and never dreamed of a lover of her own — he would have been dreadfully in her way; but she dreamed of love as something in its nature essentially refined. All the same she discriminated; it did lead to something after all, and she desired that for Francie it should n't lead to a union with Mr. Flack. She looked at such a union under the influence of that other view which she kept as yet to herself but was prepared to produce so soon as the right occasion should come up; giving her sister to understand that she would never speak to her again should this young man be allowed to suppose —! Which was where she always paused, plunging again into impressive reticence.

"To suppose what?" Francie would ask as if she were totally unacquainted — which indeed she really was — with the suppositions of young men.

"Well, you 'll see — when he begins to say things you won't like!" This sounded ominous on Delia's part, yet her anxiety was really but thin: otherwise she would have risen against the custom adopted by Mr. Flack of perpetually coming round. She would have

given her attention — though it struggled in general unsuccessfully with all this side of their life — to some prompt means of getting away from Paris. She expressed to her father what in her view the correspondent of the *Reverberator* was "after"; but without, it must be added, gaining from him the sense of it as a connexion in which he could be greatly worked up. This indeed was not of importance, thanks to her inner faith that Francie would never really do anything — that is would never really like anything — her nearest relatives did n't like.

Her sister's docility was a great comfort to Delia, the more that she herself, taking it always for granted, was the first to profit by it. She liked and disliked certain things much more than her junior did either; and Francie cultivated the convenience of her reasons, having so few of her own. They served — Delia's reasons — for Mr. Dosson as well, so that Francie was not guilty of any particular irreverence in regarding her sister rather than her father as the controller of her fate. A fate was rather an unwieldy and terrible treasure, which it relieved her that some kind person should undertake to administer. Delia had somehow got hold of hers first — before even her father, and ever so much before Mr. Flack; and it lay with Delia to make any change. She could n't have accepted any gentleman as a party to an engagement — which was somehow as far as her imagination went — without reference to Delia, any more than she could have done up her hair without a glass. The only action taken by Mr. Dosson on his elder daughter's admonitions was to convert the general issue, as

Mr. Flack would have called it, to a theme for daily pleasantry. He was fond, in his intercourse with his children, of some small usual joke, some humorous refrain; and what could have been more in the line of true domestic sport than a little gentle but unintermitted raillery on Francie's conquest? Mr. Flack's attributive intentions became a theme of indulgent parental chaff, and the girl was neither dazzled nor annoyed by the freedom of all this tribute. "Well, he *has* told us about half we know," she used to reply with an air of the judicious that the undetected observer I am perpetually moved to invoke would have found indescribably quaint.

Among the items of knowledge for which they were indebted to him floated the fact that this was the very best time in the young lady's life to have her portrait painted and the best place in the world to have it done well; also that he knew a "lovely artist," a young American of extraordinary talent, who would be delighted to undertake the job. He led his trio to this gentleman's studio, where they saw several pictures that opened to them the strange gates of mystification. Francie protested that she did n't want to be done in *that* style, and Delia declared that she would as soon have her sister shown up in a magic lantern. They had had the fortune not to find Mr. Waterlow at home, so that they were free to express themselves and the pictures were shown them by his servant. They looked at them as they looked at bonnets and *confections* when they went to expensive shops; as if it were a question, among so many specimens, of the style and colour they would choose. Mr. Waterlow's produc-

tions took their place for the most part in the category of those creations known to ladies as frights, and our friends retired with the lowest opinion of the young American master. George Flack told them however that they could n't get out of it, inasmuch as he had already written home to the *Reverberator* that Francie was to sit. They accepted this somehow as a kind of supernatural sign that she would have to, for they believed everything they ever heard quoted from a newspaper. Moreover Mr. Flack explained to them that it would be idiotic to miss such an opportunity to get something at once precious and cheap; for it was well known that impressionism was going to be the art of the future, and Charles Waterlow was a rising impressionist. It was a new system altogether and the latest improvement in art. They did n't want to go back, they wanted to go forward, and he would give them an article that would fetch five times the money in about five years — which somehow, as he put it, seemed a very short time, though it would have seemed immense for anything else. They were not in search of a bargain, but they allowed themselves to be inoculated with any reason they thought would be characteristic of informed people; and he even convinced them after a little that when once they had got used to impressionism they would never look at anything else. Mr. Waterlow was *the* man, among the young, and he had no interest in praising him, because he was not a personal friend: his reputation was advancing with strides, and any one with any sense would want to secure something before the rush.

III

The young ladies consented to return to the Avenue de Villiers, and this time they found the celebrity of the future. He was smoking cigarettes with a friend while coffee was served to the two gentlemen — it was just after luncheon — on a vast divan covered with scrappy oriental rugs and cushions; it looked, Francie thought, as if the artist had set up a carpet-shop in a corner. He struck her as very pleasant; and it may be mentioned without circumlocution that the young lady ushered in by the vulgar American reporter, whom he did n't like and who had already come too often to his studio to pick up "glimpses" (the painter wondered how in the world he had picked *her* up), this charming candidate for portraiture rose on the spot before Charles Waterlow as a precious model. She made, it may further be declared, quite the same impression on the gentleman who was with him and who never took his eyes off her while her own rested afresh on several finished and unfinished canvases. This gentleman asked of his friend at the end of five minutes the favour of an introduction to her; in consequence of which Francie learned that his name — she thought it singular — was Gaston Probert. Mr. Probert was a kind-eyed smiling youth who fingered the points of his moustache; he was represented by Mr. Waterlow as an American, but he pronounced the American language — so at least it seemed to Francie — as if it had been French.

After she had quitted the studio with Delia and Mr. Flack — her father on this occasion not being of the party — the two young men, falling back on their divan, broke into expressions of æsthetic rapture, gave it to each other that the girl had qualities — oh but qualities and a charm of line! They remained there an hour, studying these rare properties through the smoke of their cigarettes. You would have gathered from their conversation — though as regards much of it only perhaps with the aid of a grammar and dictionary — that the young lady had been endowed with plastic treasures, that is with physical graces, of the highest order, of which she was evidently quite unconscious. Before this, however, Mr. Waterlow had come to an understanding with his visitors — it had been settled that Miss Francina should sit for him at his first hour of leisure. Unfortunately that hour hovered before him as still rather distant — he was unable to make a definite appointment. He had sitters on his hands, he had at least three portraits to finish before going to Spain. He adverted with bitterness to the journey to Spain — a little excursion laid out precisely with his friend Probert for the last weeks of the spring, the first of the southern summer, the time of the long days and the real light. Gaston Probert re-echoed his regrets, for though he had no business with Miss Francina, whose name he yet liked, he also wanted to see her again. They half-agreed to give up Spain — they had after all been there before — so that Waterlow might take the girl in hand without delay, the moment he had knocked off his present work. This amendment broke down indeed, for other considerations came up and

the artist resigned himself to the arrangement on which the young women had quitted him: he thought it so characteristic of their nationality that they should settle a matter of that sort for themselves. This was simply that they should come back in the autumn, when he should be comparatively free: then there would be a margin and they might all take their time. At present, before long — by the time he should be ready — the question of the pretty one's leaving Paris for the summer would be sure to rise, and that would be a tiresome interruption. The pretty one clearly liked Paris, she had no plans for the autumn and only wanted a reason to come back about the twentieth of September. Mr. Waterlow remarked humorously that she evidently bossed the shop. Meanwhile, before starting for Spain, he would see her as often as possible — his eye would take possession of her.

His companion envied his eye, even expressed jealousy of his eye. It was perhaps as a step towards establishing his right to jealousy that Mr. Probert left a card upon the Miss Dossons at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham, having first ascertained that such a proceeding would not, by the young American sisters, be regarded as an unwarrantable liberty. Gaston Probert was an American who had never been in America and was obliged to take counsel on such an emergency as that. He knew that in Paris young men did n't call at hotels on blameless maids, but he also knew that blameless maids, unattended by a parent, did n't visit young men in studios; and he had no guide, no light he could trust — none save the wisdom of his friend Waterlow, which was for the most

part communicated to him in a derisive and misleading form. Waterlow, who was after all himself an ornament of the French, and the very French, school, jeered at the other's want of native instinct, at the way he never knew by which end to take hold of a compatriot. Poor Probert was obliged to confess to his terrible paucity of practice, and that in the great medley of aliens and brothers — and even more of sisters — he could n't tell which was which. He would have had a country and countrymen, to say nothing of countrywomen, if he could; but that matter had never been properly settled for him, and it 's one there 's ever a great difficulty in a gentleman's settling for himself. Born in Paris, he had been brought up altogether on French lines, in a family that French society had irrecoverably absorbed. His father, a Carolinian and a Catholic, was a Gallomaniac of the old American type. His three sisters had married Frenchmen, and one of them lived in Brittany while the others were ostensibly seated in Touraine. His only brother had fallen, during the Terrible Year, in defence of their adopted country. Yet Gaston, though he had had an old Legitimist marquis for godfather, was not legally one of its children; his mother had, on her death-bed, extorted from him the promise that he would n't take service in its armies; she considered, after the death of her elder son — Gaston, in 1870, had been a boy of ten — that the family had sacrificed enough on the altar of sympathy.

The young man therefore, between two stools, had no clear sitting-place: he wanted to be as American as he could and yet not less French than he was; he was

afraid to give up the little that he was and find that what he might be was less — he shrank from a flying leap which might drop him in the middle of the sea. At the same time he thought himself sure that the only way to know how it feels to be an American is to try it, and he had had many a purpose of making the pious pilgrimage. His family however had been so completely Gallicised that the affairs of each member of it were the affairs of all the rest, and his father, his sisters and his brothers-in-law had not yet begun sufficiently to regard this scheme as their own for him to feel it substantially his. It was a family in which there was no individual but only a collective property. Meanwhile he tried, as I say, by affronting minor perils, and especially by going a good deal to see Charles Waterlow in the Avenue de Villiers, whom he believed to be his dearest friend, formed for his affection by Monsieur Carolus. He had an idea that in this manner he kept himself in touch with his countrymen; and he had never pitched his endeavour so high as in leaving that card on the Misses Dosson. He was in search of freshness, but he need n't have gone far: he would have had but to turn his lantern on his own young breast to find a considerable store of it. Like many of his dawdling coævals he gave much attention to art, lived as much as possible in that more select world where it is a positive duty not to bustle. To make up for his want of talent he espoused the talent of others — that is of several — and was as sensitive and conscientious about them as he might have been about himself. He defended certain of Waterlow's purples and greens as he would have defended his own honour,

and there was a genius or two, not yet fully acclaimed by the vulgar, in regard to whom he had convictions that belonged almost to the undiscussable part of life. He had not, for himself, any very high sense of performance, but what kept it down particularly was his untractable hand, the fact that, such as they were, Waterlow's purples and greens, for instance, were far beyond him. If he had n't failed there other failures would n't have mattered, not even that of not having a country; and it was on the occasion of his friend's agreement to paint that strange lovely girl, whom he liked so much and whose companions he did n't like, that he felt supremely without a vocation. Freshness was in *her* at least, if he had only been organised for catching it. He prayed earnestly, in relation to such a triumph, for a providential re-enforcement of Waterlow's sense of that source of charm. If Waterlow had a fault it was that his freshnesses were sometimes too crude.

He avenged himself for the artist's profanation of his first attempt to approach Miss Francie by indulging at the end of another week in a second. He went about six o'clock, when he supposed she would have returned from her day's wanderings, and his prudence was rewarded by the sight of the young lady sitting in the court of the hotel with her father and sister. Mr. Dosson was new to Gaston Probert, but the young man might have been a naturalist visiting a rank country with a net of such narrow meshes as to let no creature of the air escape. The little party was as usual expecting Mr. Flack at any moment, and they had collected downstairs, so that he might pick them up

easily. They had, on the first floor, an expensive parlour, decorated in white and gold, with sofas of crimson damask; but there was something lonely in that grandeur and the place had become mainly a receptacle for their tall trunks, with a half-emptied paper of chocolates or *marrons glacés* on every table. After young Probert's first call his name was often on the lips of the simple trio, and Mr. Dosson grew still more jocose, making nothing of a secret of his perception that Francie hit the bull's-eye "every time." Mr. Waterlow had returned their visit, but that was rather a matter of course, since it was they who had gone after him. They had not gone after the other one; it was he who had come after them. When he entered the hotel, as they sat there, this pursuit and its probable motive became startlingly vivid.

Delia had taken the matter much more seriously than her father; she said there was ever so much she wanted to find out. She mused upon these mysteries visibly, but with no great advance, and she appealed for assistance to George Flack, with a candour which he appreciated and returned. If he really knew anything he ought to know at least who Mr. Probert was; and she spoke as if it would be in the natural course that as soon as he should find out he would put it for them somehow into his paper. Mr. Flack promised to "nose round"; he said the best plan would be that the results should "come back" to her in the *Reverberator;* it might have been gathered from him that "the people over there" — in other words the mass of their compatriots — would n't be unpersuadable that they wanted about a column on Mr. Probert. His

researches were to prove none the less fruitless, for in spite of the vivid fact the girl was able to give him as a starting-point, the fact that their new acquaintance had spent his whole life in Paris, the young journalist could n't scare up a single person who had even heard of him. He had questioned up and down and all over the place, from the Rue Scribe to the far end of Chaillot, and he knew people who knew others who knew every member of the American colony; that select settled body, which haunted poor Delia's imagination, glittered and re-echoed there in a hundred tormenting roundabout glimpses. That was where she wanted to "get" Francie, as she said to herself; she wanted to get her right in there. She believed the members of this society to constitute a little kingdom of the blest; and she used to drive through the Avenue Gabriel, the Rue de Marignan and the wide vistas which radiate from the Arch of Triumph and are always changing their names, on purpose to send up wistful glances to the windows — she had learned that all this was the happy quarter — of the enviable but unapproachable colonists. She saw these privileged mortals, as she supposed, in almost every victoria that made a languid lady with a pretty head dash past her, and she had no idea how little honour this theory sometimes did her expatriated countrywomen. Her plan was already made to be on the field again the next winter and take it up seriously, this question of getting Francie in.

When Mr. Flack remarked that young Probert's set could n't be either the rose or anything near it, since they had shed no petal, at any general shake, on the path of the oldest inhabitant, Delia had a flash of

inspiration, an intellectual flight that she herself did n't measure at the time. She asked if that did n't perhaps prove on the contrary quite the opposite — that they were just *the* cream and beyond all others. Was n't there a kind of inner, very *far* in, circle, and would n't they be somewhere about the centre of that? George Flack almost quivered at this weird hit as from one of the blind, for he guessed on the spot that Delia Dosson had, as he would have said, got there. "Why, do you mean one of those families that have worked down so far you can't find where they went in?" — that was the phrase in which he recognised the truth of the girl's grope. Delia's fixed eyes assented, and after a moment of cogitation George Flack broke out: "That's the kind of family we want to handle!"

"Well, perhaps they won't want to be handled," Delia had returned with a still wilder and more remarkable play of inspiration. "You had better find out," she had added.

The chance to find out might have seemed to present itself after Mr. Probert had walked in that confiding way into the hotel; for his arrival had been followed a quarter of an hour later by that of the representative of the *Reverberator*. Gaston had liked the way they treated him — though demonstrative it was not artificial. Mr. Dosson had said they had been hoping he would come round again, and Delia had remarked that she supposed he had had quite a journey — Paris was so big; and had urged his acceptance of a glass of wine or a cup of tea. Mentioning that that was n't the place where they usually re-

ceived — she liked to hear herself talk of "receiving" — she led the party up to her white-and-gold saloon, where they should be so much more private: she liked also to hear herself talk of privacy. They sat on the red silk chairs and she hoped Mr. Probert would at least taste a sugared chestnut or a chocolate; and when he declined, pleading the imminence of the dinner-hour, she sighed: "Well, I suppose you're so used to them — to the best — living so long over here." The allusion to the dinner-hour led Mr. Dosson to the frank hope that he would go round and dine with them without ceremony; they were expecting a friend — he generally settled it for them — who was coming to take them round.

"And then we're going to the circus," Francie said, speaking for the first time.

If she had not spoken before she had done something still more to the purpose; she had removed any shade of doubt that might have lingered in the young man's spirit as to her charm of line. He was aware that the education of Paris, acting upon a natural aptitude, had opened him much — rendered him perhaps even morbidly sensitive — to impressions of this order; the society of artists, the talk of studios, the attentive study of beautiful works, the sight of a thousand forms of curious research and experiment, had produced in his mind a new sense, the exercise of which was a conscious enjoyment and the supreme gratification of which, on several occasions, had given him as many indelible memories. He had once said to his friend Waterlow: "I don't know whether it's a confession of a very poor life,

but the most important things that have happened to me in this world have been simply half a dozen visual impressions — things that happened through my eyes." "Ah *malheureux*, you're lost!" the painter had exclaimed in answer to this, and without even taking the trouble to explain his ominous speech. Gaston Probert however had not been frightened by it, and he continued to be thankful for the sensitive plate that nature had lodged in his brain and that culture had brought to so high a polish. The experience of the eye was doubtless not everything, but it was so much gained, so much saved, in a world in which other treasures were apt to slip through one's fingers; and above all it had the merit that so many things gave it and that nothing could take it away. He had noted in a moment how straight Francie Dosson gave it; and now, seeing her a second time, he felt her promote it in a degree which made acquaintance with her one of those "important" facts of which he had spoken to Charles Waterlow. It was in the case of such an accident as this that he felt the value of his Parisian education. It made him revel in his modern sense.

It was therefore not directly the prospect of the circus that induced him to accept Mr. Dosson's invitation; nor was it even the charm exerted by the girl's appearing, in the few words she uttered, to appeal to him for herself. It was his feeling that on the edge of the glittering ring her type would attach him to her, to her only, and that if he knew it was rare she herself did n't. He liked to be intensely conscious, but liked others not to be. It seemed to him at this

moment, after he had told Mr. Dosson he should be delighted to spend the evening with them, that he was indeed trying hard to measure how it would feel to recover the national tie; he had jumped on the ship, he was pitching away to the west. He had led his sister, Mme. de Brécourt, to expect that he would dine with her — she was having a little party; so that if she could see the people to whom, without a scruple, with a quick sense of refreshment and freedom, he now sacrificed her! He knew who was coming to his sister's in the Place Beauvau: Mme. d'Outreville and M. de Grospré, old M. Courageau, Mme. de Brives, Lord and Lady Trantum, Mlle. de Saintonge; but he was fascinated by the idea of the contrast between what he preferred and what he gave up. His life had long been wanting — painfully wanting — in the element of contrast, and here was a chance to bring it in. He saw it come in powerfully with Mr. Flack, after Miss Dosson had proposed they should walk off without their initiator. Her father did n't favour this suggestion; he said "We want a double good dinner to-day and Mr. Flack has got to order it." Upon this Delia had asked the visitor if *he* could n't order — a Frenchman like him; and Francie had interrupted, before he could answer the question, "Well, *are* you a Frenchman? That's just the point, ain't it?" Gaston Probert replied that he had no wish but to be a citizen of *her* country, and the elder sister asked him if he knew many Americans in Paris. He was obliged to confess he knew almost none, but hastened to add he was eager to go on now he had taken such a charming start.

"Oh we ain't anything — if you mean that," Delia said. "If you go on you'll go on beyond us."

"We ain't anything here, my dear, but we're a good deal at home," Mr. Dosson jocosely interjected.

"I think we're very nice anywhere!" Francie exclaimed; upon which Gaston Probert declared that they were as delightful as possible. It was in these amenities that George Flack found them engaged; but there was none the less a certain eagerness in his greeting of the other guest, as if he had it in mind to ask him how soon he could give him half an hour. I hasten to add that with the turn the occasion presently took the correspondent of the *Reverberator* dropped the conception of making the young man "talk" for the benefit of the subscribers to that journal. They all went out together, and the impulse to pick up something, usually so irresistible in George Flack's mind, suffered an odd check. He found himself wanting to handle his fellow visitor in a sense other than the professional. Mr. Probert talked very little to Francie, but though Mr. Flack did n't know that on a first occasion he would have thought this aggressive, even rather brutal, he knew it was for Francie, and Francie alone, that the fifth member of the party was there. He said to himself suddenly and in perfect sincerity that it was a mean class anyway, the people for whom their own country was n't good enough. He did n't go so far, however, when they were seated at the admirable establishment of M. Durand in the Place de la Madeleine, as to order a bad dinner to spite his competitor; nor did he, to spoil this gentleman's amusement, take uncomfortable seats at the

pretty circus in the Champs Elysées to which, at half-past eight o'clock, the company was conveyed — it was a drive of but five minutes — in a couple of cabs. The occasion therefore was superficially smooth, and he could see that the sense of being disagreeable to an American newspaper-man was not needed to make his nondescript rival enjoy it. That gentleman did indeed hate his crude accent and vulgar laugh and above all the lamblike submission to him of their friends. Mr. Flack was acute enough for an important observation: he cherished it and promised himself to bring it to the notice of his clinging charges. Their imperturbable guest professed a great desire to be of service to the young ladies — to do what would help them to be happy in Paris; but he gave no hint of the intention that would contribute most to such a result, the bringing them in contact with the other members, especially with the female members, of his family. George Flack knew nothing about the matter, but he required for purposes of argument that Mr. Probert's family should have female members, and it was lucky for him that his assumption was just. He grasped in advance the effect with which he should impress it on Francie and Delia — but notably on Delia, who would then herself impress it on Francie — that it would be time for their French friend to talk when he had brought his mother round. *But he never would* — they might bet their pile on that! He never did, in the strange sequel — having, poor young man, no mother to bring. Moreover he was quite mum — as Delia phrased it to herself — about Mme. de Brécourt and Mme. de Cliché: such, Miss

Dosson learned from Charles Waterlow, were the names of his two sisters who had houses in Paris — gleaning at the same time the information that one of these ladies was a marquise and the other a comtesse. She was less exasperated by their non-appearance than Mr. Flack had hoped, and it did n't prevent an excursion to dine at Saint-Germain a week after the evening spent at the circus, which included both the new admirers. It also as a matter of course included Mr. Flack, for though the party had been proposed in the first instance by Charles Waterlow, who wished to multiply opportunities for studying his future sitter, Mr. Dosson had characteristically constituted himself host and administrator, with the young journalist as his deputy. He liked to invite people and to pay for them, and disliked to be invited and paid for. He was never inwardly content on any occasion unless a great deal of money was spent, and he could be sure enough of the large amount only when he himself spent it. He was too simple for conceit or for pride of purse, but always felt any arrangements shabby and sneaking as to which the expense had n't been referred to him. He never named what he paid for anything. Also Delia had made him understand that if they should go to Saint-Germain as guests of the artist and his friend Mr. Flack would n't be of the company: she was sure those gentlemen would n't rope *him* in. In fact she was too sure, for, though enjoying him not at all, Charles Waterlow would on this occasion have made a point of expressing by an act of courtesy his sense of obligation to a man who had brought him such a sub-

ject. Delia's hint however was all-sufficient for her father; he would have thought it a gross breach of friendly loyalty to take part in a festival not graced by Mr. Flack's presence. His idea of loyalty was that he should scarcely smoke a cigar unless his friend was there to take another, and he felt rather mean if he went round alone to get shaved. As regards Saint-Germain he took over the project while George Flack telegraphed for a table on the terrace at the Pavillon Henri Quatre. Mr. Dosson had by this time learned to trust the European manager of the *Reverberator* to spend his money almost as he himself would.

IV

Delia had broken out the evening they took Mr. Probert to the circus; she had apostrophised Francie as they each sat in a red-damask chair after ascending to their apartments. They had bade their companions farewell at the door of the hotel and the two gentlemen had walked off in different directions. But upstairs they had instinctively not separated; they dropped into the first places and sat looking at each other and at the highly-decorated lamps that burned night after night in their empty saloon. "Well, I want to know when you're going to stop," Delia said to her sister, speaking as if this remark were a continuation, which it was not, of something they had lately been saying.

"Stop what?" asked Francie, reaching forward for a *marron*.

"Stop carrying-on the way you do — with Mr. Flack."

Francie stared while she consumed her *marron;* then she replied in her small flat patient voice: "Why, Delia Dosson, how can you be so foolish?"

"Father, I wish you'd speak to her. Francie, I ain't foolish," Delia submitted.

"What do you want me to say to her?" Mr. Dosson enquired. "I guess I've said about all I know."

"Well, that's in fun. I want you to speak to her in earnest."

"I guess there's no one in earnest but you," Francie remarked. "These ain't so good as the last."

"No, and there won't be if you don't look out. There's something you can do if you'll just keep quiet. If you can't tell difference of style, well, I can!" Delia cried.

"What's the difference of style?" asked Mr. Dosson. But before this question could be answered Francie protested against the charge of "carrying-on." Quiet? Was n't she as quiet as a Quaker meeting? Delia replied that a girl was n't quiet so long as she did n't keep others so; and she wanted to know what her sister proposed to do about Mr. Flack. "Why don't you take him and let Francie take the other?" Mr. Dosson continued.

"That's just what I'm after — to make her take the other," said his elder daughter.

"Take him — how do you mean?" Francie returned.

"Oh you know how."

"Yes, I guess you know how!" Mr. Dosson laughed with an absence of prejudice that might have been deplored in a parent.

"Do you want to stay in Europe or not? that's what *I* want to know," Delia pursued to her sister. "If you want to go bang home you're taking the right way to do it."

"What has that got to do with it?" Mr. Dosson audibly wondered.

"Should you like so much to reside at that place — where is it? — where his paper's published? That's

where you'll have to pull up sooner or later," Delia declaimed.

"Do you want to stay right here in Europe, father?" Francie said with her small sweet weariness.

"It depends on what you mean by staying right here. I want to go right home *some* time."

"Well then you've got to go without Mr. Probert," Delia made answer with decision. "If you think he wants to live over there —"

"Why Delia, he wants dreadfully to go — he told me so himself," Francie argued with passionless pauses.

"Yes, and when he gets there he'll want to come back. I thought you were so much interested in Paris."

"My poor child, I *am* interested!" smiled Francie. "Ain't I interested, father?"

"Well, I don't know how you could act differently to show it."

"Well, I do then," said Delia. "And if you don't make Mr. Flack understand *I* will."

"Oh I guess he understands — he's so bright," Francie vaguely pleaded.

"Yes, I guess he does — he *is* bright," said Mr. Dosson. "Good-night, chickens," he added; and wandered off to a couch of untroubled repose.

His daughters sat up half an hour later, but not by the wish of the younger girl. She was always passive, however, always docile when Delia was, as she said, on the war-path, and though she had none of her sister's insistence she was courageous in suffering.

She thought Delia whipped her up too much, but there was that in her which would have prevented her ever running away. She could smile and smile for an hour without irritation, making even pacific answers, though all the while it hurt her to be heavily exhorted, much as it would have done to be violently pushed. She knew Delia loved her — not loving herself meanwhile a bit — as no one else in the world probably ever would; but there was something funny in such plans for her — plans of ambition which could only involve a "fuss." The real answer to anything, to everything her sister might say at these hours of urgency was: "Oh if you want to make out that people are thinking of me or that they ever will, you ought to remember that no one can possibly think of me half as much as you do. Therefore if there's to be any comfort for either of us we had both much better just go on as we are." She did n't however on this occasion meet her constant companion with that syllogism, because a formidable force seemed to lurk in the great contention that the star of matrimony for the American girl was now shining in the east — in England and France and Italy. They had only to look round anywhere to see it: what did they hear of every day in the week but of the engagement of somebody no better than they to some count or some lord? Delia dwelt on the evident truth that it was in that vast vague section of the globe to which she never alluded save as "over here" that the American girl was now called upon to play, under providence, her part. When Francie made the point that Mr. Probert was neither a count nor a lord her sister rejoined that she did n't care whether he was or

not. To this Francie replied that she herself did n't care, but that Delia ought to for consistency.

"Well, he's a prince compared with Mr. Flack," Delia declared.

"He has n't the same ability; not half."

"He has the ability to have three sisters who are just the sort of people I want you to know."

"What good will they do me?" Francie asked. "They'll hate me. Before they could turn round I should do something — in perfect innocence — that they'd think monstrous."

"Well, what would that matter if *he* liked you?"

"Oh but he would n't then! He'd hate me too."

"Then all you've got to do is not to do it," Delia concluded.

"Oh but I should — every time," her sister went on.

Delia looked at her a moment. "What *are* you talking about?"

"Yes, what am I? It's disgusting!" And Francie sprang up.

"I'm sorry you have such thoughts," said Delia sententiously.

"It's disgusting to talk about a gentleman — and his sisters and his society and everything else — before he has scarcely looked at you."

"It's disgusting if he is n't just dying; but it is n't if he is."

"Well, I'll make him skip!" Francie went on with a sudden approach to sharpness.

"Oh you're worse than father!" her sister cried, giving her a push as they went to bed.

They reached Saint-Germain with their companions nearly an hour before the time it had been agreed they had best dine; the purpose of this being to enable them to enjoy with what remained of daylight a stroll on the celebrated terrace and a study of the magnificent view. The evening was splendid and the atmosphere favourable to these impressions; the grass was vivid on the broad walk beside the parapet, the park and forest were fresh and leafy and the prettiest golden light hung over the curving Seine and the far-spreading city. The hill which forms the terrace stretched down among the vineyards, with the poles delicate yet in their bareness, to the river, and the prospect was spotted here and there with the red legs of the little sauntering soldiers of the garrison. How it came, after Delia's warning in regard to her carrying-on — especially as she had n't failed to feel the weight of her sister's wisdom — Francie could n't have told herself: certain it is that before ten minutes had elapsed she became aware, first, that the evening would n't pass without Mr. Flack's taking in some way, and for a certain time, peculiar possession of her; and then that he was already doing so, that he had drawn her away from the others, who were stopping behind to appreciate the view, that he made her walk faster, and that he had ended by interposing such a distance that she was practically alone with him. This was what he wanted, but it was not all; she saw he now wanted a great many other things. The large perspective of the terrace stretched away before them — Mr. Probert had said it was in the grand style — and he was determined to make her walk to

the end. She felt sorry for his ideas — she thought of them in the light of his striking energy; they were an idle exercise of a force intrinsically fine, and she wanted to protest, to let him know how truly it was a sad misuse of his free bold spirit to count on her. She was not to be counted on; she was a vague soft negative being who had never decided anything and never would, who had not even the merit of knowing how to flirt and who only asked to be let alone. She made him stop at last, telling him, while she leaned against the parapet, that he walked too fast; and she looked back at their companions, whom she expected to see, under pressure from Delia, following at the highest speed. But they were not following; they still stood together there, only looking, attentively enough, at the couple who had left them. Delia would wave a parasol, beckon her back, send Mr. Waterlow to bring her; Francie invoked from one moment to another some such appeal as that. But no appeal came; none at least but the odd spectacle, presently, of an agitation of the group, which, evidently under Delia's direction, turned round and retraced its steps. Francie guessed in a moment what was meant by that; it was the most definite signal her sister could have given. It made her feel that Delia counted on her, but to such a different end, just as poor Mr. Flack did, just as Delia wished to persuade her that Mr. Probert did. The girl gave a sigh, looking up with troubled eyes at her companion and at the figure of herself as the subject of contending policies. Such a thankless bored evasive little subject as she felt herself! What Delia had said in turning away was —"Yes,

I'm watching you, and I depend on you to finish him up. Stay there with him, go off with him — I'll allow you half an hour if necessary: only settle him once for all. It 's very kind of me to give you this chance, and in return for it I expect you to be able to tell me this evening that he has his answer. Shut him up!"

Francie did n't in the least dislike Mr. Flack. Interested as I am in presenting her favourably to the reader I am yet obliged as a veracious historian to admit that she believed him as "bright" as her father had originally pronounced him and as any young man she was likely to meet. She had no other measure for distinction in young men but their brightness; she had never been present at any imputation of ability or power that this term did n't seem to cover. In many a girl so great a kindness might have been fanned to something of a flame by the breath of close criticism. I probably exaggerate little the perversity of pretty girls in saying that our young woman might at this moment have answered her sister with: "No, I was n't in love with him, but somehow, since you 're so very disgusted, I foresee that I shall be if he presses me." It is doubtless difficult to say more for Francie's simplicity of character than that she felt no need of encouraging Mr. Flack in order to prove to herself that she was n't bullied. She did n't care whether she were bullied or not, and she was perfectly capable of letting Delia believe her to have carried mildness to the point of giving up a man she had a secret sentiment for in order to oblige a relative who fairly brooded with devotion. She was n't clear herself as

to whether it might n't be so; her pride, what she had of it, lay in an undistributed inert form quite at the bottom of her heart, and she had never yet thought of a dignified theory to cover her want of uppishness. She felt as she looked up at Mr. Flack that she did n't care even if he should think she sacrificed him to a childish docility. His bright eyes were hard, as if he could almost guess how cynical she was, and she turned her own again toward her retreating companions. "They're going to dinner; we ought n't to be dawdling here," she said.

"Well, if they're going to dinner they'll have to eat the napkins. I ordered it and I know when it'll be ready," George Flack answered. "Besides, they're not going to dinner, they're going to walk in the park. Don't you worry, we shan't lose them. I wish we could!" the young man added in his boldest gayest manner.

"You wish we could?"

"I should like to feel you just under my particular protection and no other."

"Well, I don't know what the dangers are," said Francie, setting herself in motion again. She went after the others, but at the end of a few steps he stopped her again.

"You won't have confidence. I wish you'd believe what I tell you."

"You have n't told me anything." And she turned her back to him, looking away at the splendid view. "I do love the scenery," she added in a moment.

"Well, leave it alone a little — it won't run away! I want to tell you something about myself, if I could

flatter myself you'd take any interest in it." He had thrust the raised point of his cane into the low wall of the terrace, and he leaned on the knob, screwing the other end gently round with both hands.

"I'll take an interest if I can understand," said Francie.

"You can understand right enough if you'll try. I got to-day some news from America," he went on, "that I like awfully. The *Reverberator* has taken a jump."

This was not what Francie had expected, but it was better. "Taken a jump?"

"It has gone straight up. It's in the second hundred thousand."

"Hundred thousand dollars?" said Francie.

"No, Miss Francie, copies. That's the circulation. But the dollars are footing up too."

"And do they all come to you?"

"Precious few of them! I wish they did. It's a sweet property."

"Then it is n't yours?" she asked, turning round to him. It was an impulse of sympathy that made her look at him now, for she already knew how much he had the success of his newspaper at heart. He had once told her he loved the *Reverberator* as he had loved his first jack-knife.

"Mine? You don't mean to say you suppose I own it!" George Flack shouted. The light projected upon her innocence by his tone was so strong that the girl blushed, and he went on more tenderly: "It's a pretty sight, the way you and your sister take that sort of thing for granted. Do you think property grows on

you like a moustache? Well, it seems as if it had, on your father. If I owned the *Reverberator* I would n't be stumping round here; I'd give my attention to another branch of the business. That is I'd give my attention to all, but I would n't go round with the delivery-cart. Still, I'm going to capture the blamed thing, and I want you to help me," the young man went on; "that's just what I wanted to speak to you about. It's a big proposition as it stands, but I mean to make it bigger: the most universal society-paper the world has seen. That's where the future lies, and the man who sees it first is the man who'll make his pile. It's a field for enlightened enterprise that has n't yet begun to be worked." He continued, glowing as if on a sudden with his idea, and one of his knowing eyes half-closed itself for an emphasis habitual with him when he talked consecutively. The effect of this would have been droll to a listener, the note of the prospectus mingling with the question of his more intimate hope. But it was not droll to Francie; she only thought it, or supposed it, a proof of the way Mr. Flack saw everything on a stupendous scale. "There are ten thousand things to do that have n't been done, and I'm going to do them. The society-news of every quarter of the globe, furnished by the prominent members themselves — oh *they* can be fixed, you'll see! — from day to day and from hour to hour and served up hot at every breakfast-table in the United States: that's what the American people want and that's what the American people are going to have. I would n't say it to every one, but I don't mind telling you, that I consider my guess as good as the next man's on

what's going to be required in future over there. I'm going for the inside view, the choice bits, the *chronique intime*, as they say here; what the people want 's just what ain't told, and I'm going to tell it. Oh they're bound to have the plums! That's about played out, anyway, the idea of sticking up a sign of 'private' and 'hands off' and 'no thoroughfare' and thinking you can keep the place to yourself. You ain't going to be able any longer to monopolise any fact of general interest, and it ain't going to be right you should; it ain't going to continue to be possible to keep out anywhere the light of the Press. Now what I'm going to do is to set up the biggest lamp yet made and make it shine all over the place. We'll see who's private then, and whose hands are off, and who'll frustrate the People — the People *that wants to know*. That's a sign of the American people that they *do* want to know, and it's the sign of George P. Flack," the young man pursued with a rising spirit, "that he's going to help them. But I'll make the touchy folks crowd in *themselves* with their information, and as I tell you, Miss Francie, it's a job in which you can give me a lovely lift."

"Well, I don't see how," said Francie candidly. "I have n't got any choice bits or any facts of general interest." She spoke gaily because she was relieved; she thought she had in truth a glimpse of what he wanted of her. It was something better than she had feared. Since he did n't own the great newspaper — her view of such possibilities was of the dimmest — he desired to possess himself of it, and she sufficiently grasped the idea that money was needed for that.

She further seemed to make out that he presented himself to her, that he hovered about her and pressed on her, as moneyless, and that this brought them round by a vague but comfortable transition to a helpful remembrance that her father was not. The remaining divination, silently achieved, was quick and happy: she should acquit herself by asking her father for the sum required and by just passing it on to Mr. Flack. The grandeur of his enterprise and the force of his reasoning appeared to overshadow her as they stood there. This was a delightful simplification and it did n't for the moment strike her as positively unnatural that her companion should have a delicacy about appealing to Mr. Dosson directly for financial aid, though indeed she would have been capable of thinking that odd had she meditated on it. There was nothing simpler to Francie than the idea of putting her hand into her father's pocket, and she felt that even Delia would be glad to appease their persecutor by this casual gesture. I must add unfortunately that her alarm came back to her from his look as he replied: "Do you mean to say you don't know, after all I've done?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you've done."

"Have n't I tried — all I know — to make you like me?"

"Oh dear, I do like you!" cried Francie; "but how will that help you?"

"It will help me if you'll understand how I love you."

"Well, I won't understand!" replied the girl as she walked off.

He followed her; they went on together in silence and then he said: "Do you mean to say you have n't found that out?"

"Oh I don't find things out — I ain't an editor!" Francie gaily quavered.

"You draw me out and then you gibe at me," Mr. Flack returned.

"I did n't draw you out. Why, could n't you see me just strain to get away?"

"Don't you sympathise then with my ideas?"

"Of course I do, Mr. Flack; I think your ideas splendid," said Francie, who had n't in the least taken them in.

"Well then why won't you work with me? Your affection, your brightness, your faith — to say nothing of your matchless beauty — would be everything to me."

"I'm very sorry, but I can't, I can't!" she protested.

"You could if you would, quick enough."

"Well then I won't!" And as soon as these words were spoken, as if to mitigate something of their asperity, she made her other point. "You must remember that I never said I would — nor anything like it; not one little wee mite. I thought you just wanted me to speak to poppa."

"Of course I supposed you 'd do that," he allowed.

"I mean about your paper."

"About my paper?"

"So as he could give you the money — to do what you want."

"Lord, you 're too sweet!" George Flack cried with

an illumined stare. "Do you suppose I'd ever touch a cent of your father's money?" — a speech not rankly hypocritical, inasmuch as the young man, who made his own discriminations, had never been guilty, and proposed to himself never to be, of the indelicacy of tugging at his potential father-in-law's purse-strings with his own hand. He had talked to Mr. Dosson by the hour about his master-plan of making the touchy folks themselves fall into line, but had never dreamed this man would subsidise him as an interesting struggler. The only character in which he could expect it would be that of Francie's accepted suitor, and then the liberality would have Francie and not himself for its object. This reasoning naturally did n't lessen his impatience to take on the happy character, so that his love of his profession and his appreciation of the girl at his side now ached together in his breast with the same disappointment. She saw that her words had touched him like a lash; they made him for a moment flush to his eyes. This caused her own colour to rise — she could scarcely have said why — and she hurried along again. He kept close to her; he argued with her; he besought her to think it over, assuring her he had brains, heart and material proofs of a college education. To this she replied that if he did n't leave her alone she should cry — and how would he like that, to bring her back in such a state to the others? He answered "Damn the others!" but it did n't help his case, and at last he broke out: "Will you just tell me this, then — is it because you've promised Miss Delia?" Francie returned that she had n't promised Miss Delia anything, and her companion went on:

"Of course I know what she has got in her head: she wants to get you into the smart set — the *grand monde*, as they call it here; but I did n't suppose you 'd let her fix your life for you. You were very different before *he* turned up."

"She never fixed anything for me. I have n't got any life and I don't want to have any," Francie veraciously pleaded. "And I don't know who you 're talking about either!"

"The man without a country. *He'll* pass you in — that's what your sister wants."

"You ought n't to abuse him, because it was you that presented him," the girl pronounced.

"I never presented him! I'd like to kick him."

"We should never have seen him if it had n't been for you," she maintained.

"That's a fact, but it does n't make me love him any better. He's the poorest kind there is."

"I don't care anything about his kind."

"That's a pity if you're going to marry him right off! How could I know that when I took you up there?"

"Good-bye, Mr. Flack," said Francie, trying to gain ground from him.

This attempt was of course vain, and after a moment he resumed: "Will you keep me as a friend?"

"Why Mr. Flack, *of course* I will!" cried the easy creature.

"All right," he replied; and they presently overtook their companions.

V

Gaston Probert made his plan, confiding it to no one but his friend Waterlow, whose help indeed he needed to carry it out. These revelations cost him something, for the ornament of the merciless school, as it might have been called, found his predicament amusing and made no scruple of showing it. Gaston was too much in love, however, to be upset by a bad joke or two. This fact is the more noteworthy as he knew that Waterlow scoffed at him for a purpose — had a view of the good to be done him by throwing him on the defensive. The French tradition, or a grimacing ghost of it, was in Waterlow's "manner," but it had not made its mark on his view of the relations of a young man of spirit with parents and pastors. He mixed his colours, as might have been said, with the general sense of France, but his early American immunities and serenities could still swell his sail in any "vital" discussion with a friend in whose life the principle of authority played so large a part. He accused Probert of being afraid of his sisters, which was an effective way — and he knew it — of alluding to the rigidity of the conception of the family among people who had adopted and had even to Waterlow's sense, as the phrase is, improved upon the "Latin" ideal. That did injustice — and this the artist also knew — to the delicate nature of the bond uniting the different members of the house of Probert, who

were each for all and all for each. Family feeling among them was not a tyranny but a religion, and in regard to Mesdames de Brécourt, de Cliché and de Douves what Gaston most feared was that he might seem to them not to love them enough. None the less Charles Waterlow, who thought he had charming parts, held that the best way had n't been taken to make a man of him, and the zeal with which the painter appeared to have proposed to repair that mistake was founded in esteem, though it sometimes flowered in freedom. Waterlow combined in odd fashion many of the forms of the Parisian studio with the moral and social ideas of Brooklyn Long Island, where the seeds of his strictness had been sown.

Gaston Probert desired nothing better than to be a man; what worried him — and it is perhaps a proof that his instinct was gravely at fault — was a certain vagueness as to the constituents of that character. He should approximate more nearly, as it seemed to him, to the brute were he to sacrifice in such an effort the decencies and pieties — holy things all of them — in which he had been reared. It was very well for Waterlow to say that to be a "real" man it was necessary to be a little of a brute; his friend was willing, in theory, to assent even to that. The difficulty was in application, in practice — as to which the painter declared that all would be easy if such account had n't to be taken of the marquise, the comtesse and — what was the other one? — the princess. These young amenities were exchanged between the pair — while Gaston explained, almost as eagerly as if he were

scoring a point, that the other one was only a *baronne* — during that brief journey to Spain of which mention has already been made, during the later weeks of the summer, after their return (the friends then spent a fortnight together on the coast of Brittany), and above all during the autumn, when they were settled in Paris for the winter, when Mr. Dosson had reappeared, according to the engagement with his daughters, when the sittings for the portrait had multiplied (the painter was unscrupulous as to the number he demanded), and the work itself, born under a happy star, seemed to take more and more the turn of a great thing. It was at Granada that Gaston had really broken out; there, one balmy night, he had dropped into his comrade's ear that he would marry Francina Dosson or would never marry at all. The declaration was the more striking as it had come after such an interval; many days had elapsed since their separation from the young lady and many new and beautiful objects appealed to them. It appeared that the smitten youth had been thinking of her all the while, and he let his friend know that it was the dinner at Saint-Germain that had finished him. What she had been there Waterlow himself had seen: he would n't controvert the lucid proposition that she showed a "cutting" equal to any Greek gem.

In November, in Paris — it was months and weeks before the artist began to please himself — Gaston came often to the Avenue de Villiers toward the end of a sitting and, till it was finished, not to disturb the lovely model, cultivated conversation with the elder sister: the representative of the Proberts was

capable of that. Delia was always there of course, but Mr. Dosson had not once turned up and the newspaper-man happily appeared to have faded from view. The new aspirant learned in fact from Miss Dosson that a crisis in the history of his journal had recalled Mr. Flack to the seat of that publication. When the young ladies had gone — and when he did n't go with them; he accompanied them not rarely — the visitor was almost lyrical in his appreciation of his friend's work; he had no jealousy of the act of appropriation that rendered possible in its turn such an act of handing over, of which the canvas constituted the field. He was sure Waterlow painted the girl too well to be in love with her and that if he himself could have dealt with her in that fashion he might n't have wanted to deal in any other. She bloomed there on the easel with all the purity of life, and the artist had caught the very secret of her beauty. It was exactly the way in which her lover would have chosen to see her shown, and yet it had required a perfectly independent hand. Gaston mused on this mystery and somehow felt proud of the picture and responsible for it, though it was no more his property as yet than the young lady herself.

When in December he put before Waterlow his plan of campaign the latter made a comment. "I 'll do anything in the world you like — anything you think will help you — but it passes me, my dear fellow, why in the world you don't go to them and say: 'I've seen a girl who is as good as cake and pretty as fire, she exactly suits me, I 've taken time to think of it and I know what I want; therefore I

propose to make her my wife. If you happen to like her so much the better; if you don't be so good as to keep it to yourselves.' That's much the most excellent way. Why in the name of goodness all these mysteries and machinations?"

"Oh you don't understand, you don't understand!" sighed Gaston, who had never pulled so long a face. "One can't break with one's traditions in an hour, especially when there's so much in them that one likes. I shan't love her more if they like her, but I shall love *them* more, and I care about that. You talk as a man who has nothing to consider. I've everything to consider—and I'm glad I have. My pleasure in marrying her will be double if my father and my sisters accept her, and I shall greatly enjoy working out the business of bringing them round."

There were moments when Charles Waterlow resented the very vocabulary of his friend; he hated to hear a man talk about the "acceptance" by any one but himself of the woman he loved. One's own acceptance — of one's bliss — in such a case ended the matter, and the effort to bring round those who gave her the cold shoulder was scarcely consistent with the highest spirit. Young Probert explained that of course he felt his relatives would only have to know Francina to like her, to delight in her, yet also that to know her they would first have to make her acquaintance. This was the delicate point, for social commerce with such *malheureux* as Mr. Dosson and Delia was not in the least in their usual line and it was impossible to disconnect the poor girl from her appendages. Therefore the whole question must be

approached by an oblique movement — it would never do to march straight up. The wedge should have a narrow end, which Gaston now made sure he had found. His sister Susan was another name for this subtle engine; he would break her in first and she would help him to break in the others. She was his favourite relation, his intimate friend — the most modern, the most Parisian and inflammable member of the family. She had no *suite dans les idées*, but she had perceptions, had imagination and humour, and was capable of generosity, of enthusiasm and even of blind infatuation. She had in fact taken two or three plunges of her own and ought to allow for those of others. She would n't like the Dossons superficially any better than his father or than Margaret or than Jane — he called these ladies by their English names, but for themselves, their husbands, their friends and each other they were Suzanne, Marguerite and Jeanne; but there was a good chance of his gaining her to his side. She was as fond of beauty and of the arts as he — this was one of their bonds of union. She appreciated highly Charles Waterlow's talent and there had been talk of her deciding to sit to him. It was true her husband viewed the project with so much colder an eye that it had not been carried out.

According to Gaston's plan she was to come to the Avenue de Villiers to see what the artist had done for Miss Francie; her brother was to have worked upon her in advance by his careful rhapsodies, bearing wholly on the achievement itself, the dazzling example of Waterlow's powers, and not on the young

lady, whom he was not to let her know at first that he had so much as seen. Just at the last, just before her visit, he was to mention to her that he had met the girl — at the studio — and that she was as remarkable in her way as the picture. Seeing the picture and hearing this, Mme. de Brécourt, as a disinterested lover of charming impressions, and above all as an easy prey at all times to a rabid curiosity, would express a desire also to enjoy a sight of so rare a creature; on which Waterlow might pronounce it all arrangeable if she would but come in some day when Miss Francie should sit. He would give her two or three dates and Gaston would see that she did n't let the opportunity pass. She would return alone — this time he would n't go with her — and she would be as taken as could be hoped or needed. Everything much depended on that, but it could n't fail. The girl would have to take her, but the girl could be trusted, especially if she did n't know who the demonstrative French lady was, with her fine plain face, her hair so blond as to be nearly white, her vividly red lips and protuberant light-coloured eyes. Their host was to do no introducing and to reveal the visitor's identity only after she had gone. That was a condition indeed this participant grumbled at; he called the whole business an odious comedy, though his friend knew that if he undertook it he would acquit himself honourably. After Mme. de Brécourt had been captivated — the question of how Francie would be affected received in advance no consideration — her brother would throw off the mask and convince her that she must now work with him. Another meeting

would be managed for her with the girl — in which each would appear in her proper character; and in short the plot would thicken.

Gaston's forecast of his difficulties showed how finely he could analyse; but that was not rare enough in any French connexion to make his friend stare. He brought Suzanne de Brécourt, she was enchanted with the portrait of the little American, and the rest of the drama began to follow in its order. Mme. de Brécourt raved to Waterlow's face — she had no opinions behind people's backs — about his mastery of his craft; she could dispose the floral tributes of homage with a hand of practice all her own. She was the reverse of egotistic and never spoke of herself; her success in life sprang from a much wiser adoption of pronouns. Waterlow, who liked her and had long wanted to paint her ugliness — it was a gold-mine of charm — had two opinions about her: one of which was that she knew a hundred times less than she thought, and even than her brother thought, of what she talked about; and the other that she was after all not such a humbug as she seemed. She passed in her family for a rank radical, a bold Bohemian; she picked up expressions out of newspapers and at the *petits théâtres*, but her hands and feet were celebrated, and her behaviour was not. That of her sisters, as well, had never been disastrously exposed.

"But she must be charming, your young lady," she said to Gaston while she turned her head this way and that as she stood before Francie's image. "She's a little Renaissance statuette cast in silver, something

of Jean Goujon or Germain Pilon." The young men exchanged a glance, for this struck them as the happiest comparison, and Gaston replied in a detached way that the girl was well worth seeing.

He went in to have a cup of tea with his sister on the day he knew she would have paid her second visit to the studio, and the first words she greeted him with were: "But she's admirable — *votre petite* — admirable, admirable!" There was a lady calling in the Place Beauvau at the moment — old Mme. d'Outreville — who naturally asked for news of the object of such enthusiasm. Gaston suffered Susan to answer all questions and was attentive to her account of the new beauty. She described his young friend almost as well as he would have done, from the point of view of her type, her graces, her plastic value, using various technical and critical terms to which the old lady listened in silence, solemnly, rather coldly, as if she thought such talk much of a *galimatias:* she belonged to the old-fashioned school and held a pretty person sufficiently catalogued when it had been said she had a dazzling complexion or the finest eyes in the world.

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est que cette merveille?*" she enquired; to which Mme. de Brécourt made answer that it was a little American her brother had somewhere dug up. "And what do you propose to do with it, may one ask?" Mme. d'Outreville demanded, looking at Gaston with an eye that seemed to read his secret and that brought him for half a minute to the point of breaking out: "I propose to marry it — there!" But he contained himself, only pleading

for the present his wish to ascertain the uses to which she was adapted; meanwhile, he added, there was nothing he so much liked as to look at her, in the measure in which she would allow him. "Ah that may take you far!" their visitor cried as she got up to go; and the young man glanced at his sister to see if she too were ironic. But she seemed almost awkwardly free from alarm; if she had been suspicious it would have been easier to make his confession. When he came back from accompanying their old friend Outreville to her carriage he asked her if Waterlow's charming sitter had known who she was and if she had been frightened. Mme. de Brécourt stared; she evidently thought that kind of sensibility implied an initiation — and into dangers — which a little American accidentally encountered could n't possibly have. "Why should she be frightened? She would n't be even if she had known who I was; much less therefore when I was nothing for her."

"Oh you were n't nothing for her!" the brooding youth declared; and when his sister rejoined that he was *trop aimable* he brought out his lurking fact. He had seen the lovely creature more often than he had mentioned; he had particularly wished that *she* should see her. Now he wanted his father and Jane and Margaret to do the same, and above all he wanted them to like her even as she, Susan, liked her. He was delighted she had been taken — he had been so taken himself. Mme. de Brécourt protested that she had reserved her independence of judgement, and he answered that if she thought Miss Dosson repulsive she might have expressed it in another way. When

she begged him to tell her what he was talking about and what he wanted them all to do with the child he said: "I want you to treat her kindly, tenderly, for such as you see her I'm thinking of bringing her into the family."

"Mercy on us — you have n't proposed for her?" cried Mme. de Brécourt.

"No, but I've sounded her sister as to *their* dispositions, and she tells me that if I present myself there will be no difficulty."

"Her sister? — the awful little woman with the big head?"

"Her head 's rather out of drawing, but it is n't a part of the affair. She's very inoffensive; she would be devoted to me."

"For heaven's sake then keep quiet. She's as common as a dressmaker's bill."

"Not when you know her. Besides, that has nothing to do with Francie. You could n't find words enough a moment ago to express that Francie's exquisite, and now you'll be so good as to stick to that. Come — feel it all; since you *have* such a free mind."

"Do you call her by her little name like that?" Mme. de Brécourt asked, giving him another cup of tea.

"Only to you. She's perfectly simple. It's impossible to imagine anything better. And think of the delight of having that charming object before one's eyes — always, always! It makes a different look-out for life."

Mme. Brécourt's lively head tossed this argument as high as if she had carried a pair of horns. "My

poor child, what are you thinking of? You can't pick up a wife like that — the first little American that comes along. You know I hoped you would n't marry at all — what a pity I think it for a man. At any rate if you expect us to like Miss — what's her name? — Miss Fancy, all I can say is we won't. We can't *do* that sort of thing!"

"I shall marry her then," the young man returned, "without your leave given!"

"Very good. But if she deprives you of our approval — you've always had it, you're used to it and depend on it, it's a part of your life — you'll hate her like poison at the end of a month."

"I don't care then. I shall have always had my month."

"And she — poor thing?"

"Poor thing exactly! You'll begin to pity her, and that will make you cultivate charity, and cultivate *her with* it; which will then make you find out how adorable she is. Then you'll like her, then you'll love her, then you'll see what a perfect sense for the right thing, the right thing for *me*, I've had, and we shall all be happy together again."

"But how can you possibly know, with such people," Mme. de Brécourt demanded, "what you've got hold of?"

"By having a feeling for what's really, what's delicately good and charming. You pretend to have it, and yet in such a case as this you try to be stupid. Give that up; you might as well first as last, for the girl's an exquisite fact, she'll *prevail*, and it will be better to accept her than to let her accept you."

Mme. de Brécourt asked him if Miss Dosson had a fortune, and he said he knew nothing about that. Her father certainly must be rich, but he did n't mean to ask for a penny with her. American fortunes moreover were the last things to count upon; a truth of which they had seen too many examples. To this his sister had replied: "Papa will never listen to that."

"Listen to what?"

"To your not finding out, to your not asking for settlements — *comme cela se fait.*"

"Pardon me, papa will find out for himself; and he 'll know perfectly whether to ask or whether to leave it alone. That 's the sort of thing he does know. And he knows quite as well that I 'm very difficult to place."

"You 'll be difficult, my dear, if we lose you," Mme. de Brécourt laughed, "to *re*place!"

"Always at any rate to find a wife for. I 'm neither fish nor flesh. I 've no country, no career, no future; I offer nothing; I bring nothing. What position under the sun do I confer? There 's a fatuity in our talking as if we could make grand terms. You and the others are well enough: *qui prend mari prend pays*, and you 've names about which your husbands take a great stand. But papa and I — I ask you!"

"As a family *nous sommes très-bien*," said Mme. de Brécourt. "You know what we are — it does n't need any explanation. We 're as good as anything there is and have always been thought so. You might do anything you like."

"Well, I shall never like to marry — when it comes to that — a Frenchwoman."

"Thank you, my dear" — and Mme. de Brécourt tossed her head.

"No sister of mine 's really French," returned the young man.

"No brother of mine 's really mad. Marry whomever you like," Susan went on; "only let her be the best of her kind. Let her be at least a gentlewoman. Trust me, I've studied life. That's the only thing that's safe."

"Francie 's the equal of the first lady in the land."

"With that sister — with that hat? Never — never!"

"What's the matter with her hat?"

"The sister's told a story. It was a document — it described them, it classed them. And such a *patois* as they speak!"

"My dear, her English is quite as good as yours. You don't even know how bad yours is," the young man went on with assurance.

"Well, I don't say 'Parus' and I never asked an Englishman to marry me. You know what our feelings are," his companion as ardently pursued; "our convictions, our susceptibilities. We may be wrong, we may be hollow, we may be pretentious, we may n't be able to say on what it all rests; but there we are, and the fact's insurmountable. It's simply impossible for us to live with vulgar people. It's a defect, no doubt; it's an immense inconvenience, and in the days we live in it's sadly against one's interest. But we 're made like that and we must understand ourselves. It's of the very essence of our nature, and of yours exactly as much as of mine or of that of the

others. Don't make a mistake about it — you'll prepare for yourself a bitter future. I know what becomes of us. We suffer, we go through tortures, we die!"

The accent of passionate prophecy was in this lady's voice, but her brother made her no immediate answer, only indulging restlessly in several turns about the room. At last he took up his hat. "I shall come to an understanding with her to-morrow, and the next day, about this hour, I shall bring her to see you. Meanwhile please say nothing to any one."

Mme. de Brécourt's eyes lingered on him; he had grasped the knob of the door. "What do you mean by her father's being certainly rich? That's such a vague term. What do you suppose his fortune to be?"

"Ah that's a question *she* would never ask!" her brother cried as he left her.

VI

The next morning he found himself seated on one of the red-satin sofas beside Mr. Dosson in this gentleman's private room at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham. Delia and Francie had established their father in the old quarters; they expected to finish the winter in Paris, but had not taken independent apartments, for they had an idea that when you lived that way it was grand but lonely — you did n't meet people on the staircase. The temperature was now such as to deprive the good gentleman of his usual resource of sitting in the court, and he had not yet discovered an effective substitute for this recreation. Without Mr. Flack, at the cafés, he felt too much a non-consumer. But he was patient and ruminant; young Probert grew to like him and tried to invent amusements for him; took him to see the great markets, the sewers and the Bank of France, and put him, with the highest disinterestedness, in the way of acquiring a beautiful pair of horses, which Mr. Dosson, little as he resembled a sporting character, found it a great resource, on fine afternoons, to drive with a highly scientific hand and from a smart Américaine, in the Bois de Boulogne. There was a reading-room at the bankers' where he spent hours engaged in a manner best known to himself, and he shared the great interest, the constant topic of his daughters — the portrait that was going forward in the Avenue de Villiers.

This was the subject round which the thoughts of these young ladies clustered and their activity revolved; it gave free play to their faculty for endless repetition, for monotonous insistence, for vague and aimless discussion. On leaving Mme. de Brécourt Francie's lover had written to Delia that he desired half an hour's private conversation with her father on the morrow at half-past eleven; his impatience forbade him to wait for a more canonical hour. He asked her to be so good as to arrange that Mr. Dosson should be there to receive him and to keep Francie out of the way. Delia acquitted herself to the letter.

"Well, sir, what have you got to show?" asked Francie's father, leaning far back on the sofa and moving nothing but his head, and that very little, toward his interlocutor. Gaston was placed sidewise, a hand on each knee, almost facing him, on the edge of the seat.

"To show, sir — what do you mean?"

"What do you do for a living? How do you subsist?"

"Oh comfortably enough. Of course it would be remiss in you not to satisfy yourself on that point. My income 's derived from three sources. First some property left me by my dear mother. Second a legacy from my poor brother — he had inherited a small fortune from an old relation of ours who took a great fancy to him (he went to America to see her) which he divided among the four of us in the will he made at the time of the War."

"The war — what war?" asked Mr. Dosson.

"Why the Franco-German —"

"Oh *that* old war!" And Mr. Dosson almost laughed. "Well?" he mildly continued.

"Then my father's so good as to make me a decent allowance; and some day I shall have more — from him."

Mr. Dosson appeared to think these things over. "Why, you seem to have fixed it so you live mostly on other folks."

"I shall never attempt to live on you, sir!" This was spoken with some vivacity by our young man; he felt the next moment that he had said something that might provoke a retort. But his companion showed no sharpness.

"Well, I guess there won't be any trouble about that. And what does my daughter say?"

"I have n't spoken to her yet."

"Have n't spoken to the person most interested?"

"I thought it more orthodox to break ground with you first."

"Well, when I was after Mrs. Dosson I guess I spoke to her quick enough," Francie's father just a little dryly stated. There was an element of reproach in this and Gaston was mystified, for the question about his means a moment before had been in the nature of a challenge. "How will you feel if she won't have you after you've exposed yourself this way to me?" Mr. Dosson went on.

"Well, I've a sort of confidence. It may be vain, but God grant not! I think she likes me personally, but what I'm afraid of is that she may consider she knows too little about me. She has never seen my

people — she does n't know what may be before her."

"Do you mean your family — the folks at home?" said Mr. Dosson. "Don't you believe that. Delia has moused around — *she* has found out. Delia's thorough!"

"Well, we're very simple kindly respectable people, as you'll see in a day or two for yourself. My father and sisters will do themselves the honour to wait upon you," the young man announced with a temerity the sense of which made his voice tremble.

"We shall be very happy to see them, sir," his host cheerfully returned. "Well now, let's see," the good gentleman socially mused. "Don't you expect to embrace any regular occupation?"

Gaston smiled at him as from depths. "Have *you* anything of that sort, sir?"

"Well, you have me there!" Mr. Dosson resignedly sighed. "It does n't seem as if I required anything, I'm looked after so well. The fact is the girls support me."

"I shall not expect Miss Francie to support me," said Gaston Probert.

"You're prepared to enable her to live in the style to which she's accustomed?" And his friend turned on him an eye as of quite patient speculation.

"Well, I don't think she'll miss anything. That is if she does she'll find other things instead."

"I presume she'll miss Delia, and even me a little," it occurred to Mr. Dosson to mention.

"Oh it's easy to prevent that," the young man threw off.

"Well, of course we shall be on hand." After which Mr. Dosson continued to follow the subject as at the same respectful distance. "You'll continue to reside in Paris?"

"I'll live anywhere in the world she likes. Of course my people are here — that's a great tie. I'm not without hope that it may — with time — become a reason for your daughter," Gaston handsomely wound up.

"Oh any reason'll do where Paris is concerned. Take some lunch?" Mr. Dosson added, looking at his watch.

They rose to their feet, but before they had gone many steps — the meals of this amiable family were now served in an adjoining room — the young man stopped his companion. "I can't tell you how kind I think it — the way you treat me, and how I'm touched by your confidence. You take me just as I am, with no recommendation beyond my own word."

"Well, Mr. Probert," said his host, "if we did n't like you we would n't smile on you. Recommendations in that case would n't be any good. And since we do like you there ain't any call for them either. I trust my daughters; if I did n't I'd have stayed at home. And if I trust them, and they trust you, it's the same as if *I* trusted you, ain't it?"

"I guess it is!" Gaston delightedly smiled.

His companion laid a hand on the door, but paused a moment. "Now are you very sure?"

"I thought I was, but you make me nervous."

"Because there was a gentleman here last year — I'd have put my money on *him*."

Gaston wondered. "A gentleman — last year?"

"Mr. Flack. You met him surely. A very fine man. I thought he rather hit it off with her."

"*Seigneur Dieu!*" Gaston Probert murmured under his breath.

Mr. Dosson had opened the door; he made his companion pass into the small dining-room where the table was spread for the noonday breakfast. "Where are the chickens?" he disappointedly asked. His visitor at first supposed him to have missed a customary dish from the board, but recognised the next moment his usual designation of his daughters. These young ladies presently came in, but Francie looked away from the suitor for her hand. The suggestion just dropped by her father had given him a shock — the idea of the newspaper-man's personal success with so rare a creature was inconceivable — but her charming way of avoiding his eye convinced him he had nothing to really fear from Mr. Flack.

That night — it had been an exciting day — Delia remarked to her sister that of course she could draw back; upon which as Francie repeated the expression with her so markedly looser grasp, "You can send him a note saying you won't," Delia explained.

"Won't marry him?"

"Gracious, no! Won't go to see his sister. You can tell him it's her place to come to see you first."

"Oh I don't care," said Francie wearily.

Delia judged this with all her weight. "Is that the way you answered him when he asked you?"

"I'm sure I don't know. He could tell you best."

"If you were to speak to *me* that way I guess I'd

have said 'Oh well, if you don't want it any more than that —!'"

"Well, I wish it *was* you," said Francie.

"That Mr. Probert was me?"

"No — that you were the one he's after."

"Francie Dosson, are you thinking of Mr. Flack?" her sister suddenly broke out.

"No, not much."

"Well then what's the matter?"

"You've ideas and opinions; you know whose place it is and what's due and what ain't. You could meet them all," Francie opined.

But Delia was indifferent to this tribute. "Why how can you say, when that's just what I'm trying to find out!"

"It does n't matter anyway; it will never come off," Francie went on.

"What do you mean by that?"

"He'll give me up in a few weeks. I'll be sure to do something."

"Do something —?"

"Well, that will break the charm," Francie sighed with the sweetest feeblest fatalism.

"If you say that again I shall think you do it on purpose!" Delia declared. "*Are* you thinking of George Flack?" she repeated in a moment.

"Oh do leave him alone!" Francie answered in one of her rare irritations.

"Then why are you so queer?"

"Oh I'm tired!" — and the girl turned impatiently away. And this was the simple truth; she was tired of the consideration her sister saw fit to devote to the

question of Gaston's not having, since their return to Paris, brought the old folks, as they used to say at home, to see them. She was overdone with Delia's theories on this subject, which varied, from the view that he was keeping his intercourse with his American friends unguessed by them because they were uncompromising in their grandeur, to the presumption that that grandeur would descend some day upon the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham and carry Francie away in a blaze of glory. Sometimes Delia played in her earnest way with the idea that they ought to make certain of Gaston's omissions the ground of a challenge; at other times she gave her reasons for judging that they ought to take no notice of them. Francie, in this connexion, had neither doctrine nor instinct of her own; and now she was all at once happy and uneasy, all at once in love and in doubt and in fear and in a state of native indifference. Her lover had dwelt to her but little on his domestic circle, and she had noticed this circumstance the more because of a remark dropped by Charles Waterlow to the effect that he and his father were great friends: the word seemed to her odd in that application. She knew he saw that gentleman and the types of high fashion, as she supposed, Mr. Probert's daughters, very often, and she therefore took for granted that they knew he saw her. But the most he had done was to say they would come and see her like a shot if once they should believe they could trust her. She had wanted to know what he meant by their trusting her, and he had explained that it would seem to them too good to be true — that she should be kind to *him:* something exactly of that sort

was what they dreamed of for him. But they had dreamed before and been disappointed and were now so on their guard. From the moment they should feel they were on solid ground they would join hands and dance round her. Francie's answer to this ingenuity was that she did n't know what he was talking about, and he indulged in no attempt on that occasion to render his meaning more clear; the consequence of which was that he felt he bore as yet with an insufficient mass, he cut, to be plain, a poor figure. His uneasiness had not passed away, for many things in truth were dark to him. He could n't see his father fraternising with Mr. Dosson, he could n't see Margaret and Jane recognising an alliance in which Delia was one of the allies. He had answered for them because that was the only thing to do, and this only just failed to be criminally reckless. What saved it was the hope he founded upon Mme. de Brécourt and the sense of how well he could answer to the others for Francie. He considered that Susan had in her first judgement of his young lady committed herself; she had really taken her in, and her subsequent protest when she found what was in his heart had been a denial which he would make her in turn deny. The girl's slow sweetness once acting, she would come round. A simple interview with Francie would suffice for this result — by the end of half an hour she should be an enthusiastic convert. By the end of an hour she would believe she herself had invented the match — had discovered the pearl. He would pack her off to the others as the author of the plan; she would take it all upon herself, would represent him even as hanging a little

back. *She* would do nothing of that sort, but would boast of her superior *flair*, and would so enjoy the comedy as to forget she had resisted him even a moment. The young man had a high sense of honour but was ready in this forecast for fifty fibs.

VII

It may as well be said at once that his prevision was soon made good and that in the course of a fortnight old Mr. Probert and his daughters alighted successively at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham. Francie's visit with her intended to Mme. de Brécourt bore exactly the fruit her admirer had foretold and was followed the very next day by a call from this lady. She took the girl out with her in her carriage and kept her the whole afternoon, driving her half over Paris, chattering with her, kissing her, delighting in her, telling her they were already sisters, paying her compliments that made Francie envy her art of saying things as she had never heard things said — for the excellent reason, among many, that she had never known such things *could* be. After she had dropped her charge this critic rushed off to her father's, reflecting with pleasure that at that hour she should probably find her sister Marguerite there. Mme. de Cliché was with their parent in fact — she had three days in the week for coming to the Cours la Reine; she sat near him in the firelight, telling him presumably her troubles, for, Maxime de Cliché having proved not quite the pearl they had originally supposed, Mme. de Brécourt knew what Marguerite did whenever she took that little ottoman and drew it close to the paternal chair: she gave way to her favourite vice, that of dolefulness, which lengthened her long face more: it was unbecoming if she only

knew it. The family was intensely united, as we see; but that did n't prevent Mme. de Brécourt's having a certain sympathy for Maxime: he too was one of themselves, and she asked herself what *she* would have done had she been a well-constituted man with a wife whose cheeks were like decks in a high sea. It was the twilight hour in the winter days, before the lamps, that especially brought her out; then she began her long stories about her complicated cares, to which her father listened with angelic patience. Mme. de Brécourt liked his particular room in the old house in the Cours la Reine; it reminded her of her mother's life and her young days and her dead brother and the feelings connected with her first going into the world. Alphonse and she had had an apartment, by her father's kindness, under the roof that covered in associations as the door of a linen-closet preserves herbaceous scents, so that she continued to pop in and out, full of her fresh impressions of society, just as she had done when she was a girl. She broke into her sister's confidences now; she announced her *trouvaille* and did battle for it bravely.

Five days later — there had been lively work in the meantime; Gaston turned so pale at moments that she feared it would all result in a mortal illness for him, and Marguerite shed gallons of tears — Mr. Probert went to see the Dossons with his son. Mme. de Brécourt paid them another visit, a real official affair as she deemed it, accompanied by her husband; and the Baron de Douves and his wife, written to by Gaston, by his father and by Margaret and Susan, came up from the country full of anxious

participation. M. de Douves was the person who took the family, all round, most seriously and who most deprecated any sign of crude or precipitate action. He was a very small black gentleman with thick eyebrows and high heels — in the country and the mud he wore *sabots* with straw in them — who was suspected by his friends of believing that he looked like Louis XIV. It is perhaps a proof that something of the quality of this monarch was really recognised in him that no one had ever ventured to clear up this point by a question. "*La famille c'est moi*" appeared to be his tacit formula, and he carried his umbrella — he had very bad ones, Gaston thought — with something of a sceptral air. Mme. de Brécourt went so far as to believe that his wife, in confirmation of this, took herself for a species of Mme. de Maintenon: she had lapsed into a provincial existence as she might have harked back to the seventeenth century; the world she lived in seemed about as far away. She was the largest, heaviest member of the family, and in the Vendée was thought majestic despite the old clothes she fondly affected and which added to her look of having come down from a remote past or reverted to it. She was at bottom an excellent woman, but she wrote *roy* and *foy* like her husband, and the action of her mind was wholly restricted to questions of relationship and alliance. She had extraordinary patience of research and tenacity of grasp for a clue, and viewed people solely in the light projected upon them by others; that is not as good or wicked, ugly or handsome, wise or foolish, but as grandsons, nephews, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters-in-

law, cousins and second cousins. You might have supposed, to listen to her, that human beings were susceptible of no attribute but that of a dwindling or thickening consanguinity. There was a certain expectation that she would leave rather formidable memoirs. In Mme. de Brécourt's eyes this pair were very shabby, they did n't *payer de mine* — they fairly smelt of their province; "but for the reality of the thing," she often said to herself, "they're worth all of us. We're diluted and they're pure, and any one with an eye would see it." "The thing" was the legitimist principle, the ancient faith and even a little the right, the unconscious, grand air.

The Marquis de Cliché did his duty with his wife, who mopped the decks, as Susan said, for the occasion, and was entertained in the red-satin drawing-room by Mr. Dosson, Delia and Francie. Mr. Dosson had wanted and proposed to be somewhere else when he heard of the approach of Gaston's relations, and the fond youth had to instruct him that this would n't do. The apartment in question had had a range of vision, but had probably never witnessed stranger doings than these laudable social efforts. Gaston was taught to feel that his family had made a great sacrifice for him, but in a very few days he said to himself that now they knew the worst he was safe. They made the sacrifice, they definitely agreed to it, but they thought proper he should measure the full extent of it. "Gaston must never, never, never be allowed to forget what we've done for him:" Mme. de Brécourt told him that Marguerite de Cliché had expressed herself in that sense at one

of the family conclaves from which he was absent. These high commissions sat for several days with great frequency, and the young man could feel that if there was help for him in discussion his case was promising. He flattered himself that he showed infinite patience and tact, and his expenditure of the latter quality in particular was in itself his only reward, for it was impossible he should tell Francie what arts he had to practise for her. He liked to think however that he practised them successfully; for he held that it was by such arts the civilised man is distinguished from the savage. What they cost him was made up simply in this — that his private irritation produced a degree of adoptive heat in regard to Mr. Dosson and Delia, whom he could neither justify nor coherently account for nor make people like, but whom he had ended after so many days of familiar intercourse by liking extremely himself. The way to get on with them — it was an immense simplification — was just to love them: one could do that even if one could n't converse with them. He succeeded in making Mme. de Brécourt seize this *nuance;* she embraced the idea with her quick inflammability. "Yes," she said, "we must insist on their positive, not on their negative merits: their infinite generosity, their untutored, their intensely native and instinctive delicacy. Ah their charming primitive instincts — we must work those!" And the brother and sister excited each other magnanimously to this undertaking. Sometimes, it must be added, they exchanged a look that seemed to sound with a slight alarm the depth of their responsibility.

On the day Mr. Probert called at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham with his son the pair walked away together, back to the Cours la Reine, without immediate comments. The only words uttered were three or four of Mr. Probert's, with Gaston's rejoinder, as they crossed the Place de la Concorde.

"We should have to have them to dinner."

The young man noted his father's conditional, as if his assent to the strange alliance were not yet complete; but he guessed all the same that the sight of them had not made a difference for the worse: they had let the old gentleman down more easily than was to have been feared. The call had had above all the immense luck that it had n't been noisy — a confusion of underbred sounds; which was very happy, for Mr. Probert was particular in this: he could bear French noise but could n't for the life of him bear American. As for English he maintained that there was no such thing: England was a country with the straw down in all the thoroughfares of talk. Mr. Dosson had scarcely spoken and yet had remained perfectly placid, which was exactly what Gaston would have chosen. No *hauteur* could have matched it — he had gone so little out of his way. Francie's lover knew moreover — though he was a little disappointed that no charmed exclamation should have been dropped as they quitted the hotel — that the girl's rare spell had worked: it was impossible the old man should n't have liked her.

"Ah do ask them, and let it be very soon," he replied. "They'll like it so much."

"And whom can they meet — who can meet *them?*"

"Only the family — all of us: *au complet.* Other people we can have later."

"All of us *au complet* — that makes eight. And the three of *them,*" said Mr. Probert. Then he added: "Poor creatures!" The fine ironic humane sound of it gave Gaston much pleasure; he passed his hand into his father's arm. It promised well; it made the intelligent, the tender allowance for the dear little Dossons confronted with a row of fierce French critics, judged by standards they had never even heard of. The meeting of the two parents had not made the problem of their commerce any more clear; but our youth was reminded afresh by his elder's hinted pity, his breathed charity, of the latent liberality that was really what he had built on. The dear old governor, goodness knew, had prejudices and superstitions, but if they were numerous, and some of them very curious, they were not rigid. He had also such nice inconsistent feelings, such irrepressible indulgences, such humorous deviations, and they would ease everything off. He was in short an old darling, and with an old darling in the long run one was always safe. When they reached the house in the Cours la Reine Mr. Probert said: "I think you told me you're dining out."

"Yes, with our friends."

"'Our friends'? *Comme vous y allez!* Come in and see me then on your return; but not later than half-past ten."

From this the young man saw he had swallowed the dose; if he had found it refuse to go down he would

have cried for relief without delay. This reflexion was highly agreeable, for Gaston perfectly knew how little he himself would have enjoyed a struggle. He would have carried it through, but he could n't bear to think of that, and the sense of the further arguments he was spared made him feel at peace with all the world. The dinner at the hotel became the gayest of banquets in honour of this state of things, especially as Francie and Delia raved, as they said, about his poppa.

"Well, I expected something nice, but he goes far beyond!" Delia declared. "That's my idea of a real gentleman."

"Ah for that —!" said Gaston.

"He's too sweet for anything. I'm not a bit afraid of him," Francie contributed.

"Why in the world should you be?"

"Well, I am of you," the girl professed.

"Much you show it!" her lover returned.

"Yes, I am," she insisted, "at the bottom of all."

"Well, that's what a lady should be — afraid of her lord and master."

"Well, I don't know; I'm more afraid than that. You'll see."

"I wish you were afraid of talking nonsense," said happy Gaston.

Mr. Dosson made no observation whatever about their grave bland visitor; he listened in genial unprejudiced silence. It was a sign of his prospective son-in-law's perfect comprehension of him that Gaston knew this silence not to be in any degree restrictive: it did n't at all mean he had n't been pleased. Mr. Dosson had nothing to say because nothing had been

given him; he had n't, like his so differently-appointed young friend, a sensitive plate for a brain, and the important events of his life had never been personal impressions. His mind had had absolutely no history with which anything occurring in the present connexion could be continuous, and Mr. Probert's appearance had neither founded a state nor produced a revolution. If the young man had asked him how he liked his father he would have said at the most: "Oh I guess he 's all right!" But what was more touchingly candid even than this in Gaston's view was the attitude of the good gentleman and his daughters toward the others, Mesdames de Douves, de Brécourt and de Cliché and their husbands, who had now all filed before them. They believed the ladies and the gentlemen alike to have covered them with frank endearments, to have been artlessly and gushingly glad to make their acquaintance. They had not in the least seen what was manner, the minimum of decent profession, and what the subtle resignation of old races who have known a long historical discipline and have conventional forms and tortuous channels and grimacing masks for their impulses — forms resembling singularly little the feelings themselves. Francie took people at their word when they told her that the whole *manière d'être* of her family inspired them with an irresistible sympathy: that was a speech of which Mme. de Cliché had been capable, speaking as if for all the Proberts and for the old noblesse of France. It would n't have occurred to the girl that such things need have been said as for mere frilling and finish. Her lover, whose life affected her as a picture, of high price in

itself but set in a frame too big and too heavy for it, and who therefore might have taken for granted any amount of gilding, yet made his reflexions on it now; he noticed how a manner might be a very misleading symbol, might cover pitfalls and bottomless gulfs, when it had reached that perfection and corresponded so little to fact. What he had wanted was that his people should be as easy as they could see their way to being, but with such a high standard of compliment where after all was sincerity? And without sincerity how could people get on together when it came to their settling down to common life? Then the Dossons might have surprises, and the surprises would be painful in proportion as their present innocence was great. As to the high standard itself there was no manner of doubt: there ought to be preserved examples of that perfection.

VIII

When on coming home again this evening, meanwhile, he complied with his father's request by returning to the room in which the old man habitually sat, Mr. Probert laid down his book and kept on his glasses. "Of course you'll continue to live with me. You'll understand that I don't consent to your going away. You'll have the rooms occupied at first by Susan and Alphonse."

Gaston noted with pleasure the transition from the conditional to the future tense, and also the circumstance that his father had been lost in a book according to his now confirmed custom of evening ease. This proved him not too much off the hinge. He read a great deal, and very serious books; works about the origin of things — of man, of institutions, of speech, of religion. This habit he had taken up more particularly since the circle of his social life had contracted. He sat there alone, turning his pages softly, contentedly, with the lamplight shining on his refined old head and embroidered dressing-gown. He had used of old to be out every night in the week — Gaston was perfectly aware that to many dull people he must even have appeared a little frivolous. He was essentially a social creature and indeed — except perhaps poor Jane in her damp old castle in Brittany — they were all social creatures. That was doubtless part of the reason why the family had acclimatised itself in

France. They had affinities with a society of conversation; they liked general talk and old high salons, slightly tarnished and dim, containing precious relics, where winged words flew about through a circle round the fire and some clever person, before the chimney-piece, held or challenged the others. That figure, Gaston knew, especially in the days before he could see for himself, had very often been his father, the lightest and most amiable specimen of the type that enjoyed easy possession of the hearth-rug. People left it to him; he was so transparent, like a glass screen, and he never triumphed in debate. His word on most subjects was not felt to be the last (it was usually not more conclusive than a shrugging inarticulate resignation, an "Ah you know, what will you have?"); but he had been none the less a part of the very prestige of some dozen good houses, most of them over the river, in the conservative *faubourg*, and several to-day profaned shrines, cold and desolate hearths. These had made up Mr. Probert's pleasant world — a world not too small for him and yet not too large, though some of them supposed themselves great institutions. Gaston knew the succession of events that had helped to make a difference, the most salient of which were the death of his brother, the death of his mother, and above all perhaps the demise of Mme. de Marignac, to whom the old boy used still to go three or four evenings out of the seven and sometimes even in the morning besides. Gaston fully measured the place she had held in his father's life and affection, and the terms on which they had grown up together — her people had been friends of his grandfather when that

fine old Southern worthy came, a widower with a young son and several negroes, to take his pleasure in Paris in the time of Louis Philippe — and the devoted part she had played in marrying his sisters. He was quite aware that her friendship and all its exertions were often mentioned as explaining their position, so remarkable in a society in which they had begun after all as outsiders. But he would have guessed, even if he had not been told, what his father said to that. To offer the Proberts a position was to carry water to the fountain; they had n't left their own behind them in Carolina; it had been large enough to stretch across the sea. As to what it was in Carolina there was no need of being explicit. This adoptive Parisian was by nature presupposing, but he was admirably *urbane* — that was why they let him talk so before the fire; he was the oracle persuasive, the conciliatory voice — and after the death of his wife and of Mme. de Marignac, who had been her friend too, the young man's mother's, he was gentler, if more detached, than before. Gaston had already felt him to care in consequence less for everything — except indeed for the true faith, to which he drew still closer — and this increase of indifference doubtless helped to explain his present charming accommodation.

"We shall be thankful for any rooms you may give us," his son said. "We shall fill out the house a little, and won't that be rather an improvement, shrunken as you and I have become?"

"You 'll fill it out a good deal, I suppose, with Mr. Dosson and the other girl."

"Ah Francie won't give up her father and sister, certainly; and what should you think of her if she did? But they're not intrusive; they're essentially modest people; they won't put themselves upon us. They have great natural discretion," Gaston declared.

"Do you answer for that? Susan does; she's always assuring one of it," Mr. Probert said. "The father has so much that he would n't even speak to me."

"He did n't, poor dear man, know what to say."

"How then shall I know what to say to *him?*"

"Ah you always know!" Gaston smiled.

"How will that help us if he does n't know what to answer?"

"You'll draw him out. He's full of a funny little shade of *bonhomie*."

"Well, I won't quarrel with your *bonhomme*," said Mr. Probert — "if he's silent there are much worse faults; nor yet with the fat young lady, though she's evidently vulgar — even if you call it perhaps too a funny little shade. It's not for ourselves I'm afraid; it's for them. They'll be very unhappy."

"Never, never!" said Gaston. "They're too simple. They'll remain so. They're not morbid nor suspicious. And don't you like Francie? You have n't told me so," he added in a moment.

"She talks about 'Parus,' my dear boy."

"Ah to Susan too that seemed the great barrier. But she has got over it. I mean Susan has got over the barrier. We shall make her speak French; she has a real disposition for it; her French is already almost as good as her English."

"That ought n't to be difficult. What will you have? Of course she 's very pretty and I 'm sure she 's good. But I won't tell you she is a marvel, because you must remember — you young fellows think your own point of view and your own experience everything — that I 've seen beauties without number. I've known the most charming women of our time — women of an order to which Miss Francie, *con rispetto parlando*, will never begin to belong. I'm difficult about women — how can I help it? Therefore when you pick up a little American girl at an inn and bring her to us as a miracle, I feel how standards alter. *J'ai vu mieux que ça, mon cher.* However, I accept everything to-day, as you know; when once one has lost one's enthusiasm everything 's the same and one might as well perish by the sword as by famine."

"I hoped she'd fascinate you on the spot," Gaston rather ruefully remarked.

"'Fascinate' — the language you fellows use! How many times in one's life is one likely to be fascinated?"

"Well, she'll charm you yet."

"She'll never know at least that she does n't: I'll engage for that," said Mr. Probert handsomely.

"Ah be sincere with her, father — she 's worth it!" his son broke out.

When the elder man took that tone, the tone of vast experience and a fastidiousness justified by ineffable recollections, our friend was more provoked than he could say, though he was also considerably amused, for he had a good while since made up his mind about

the element of rather stupid convention in it. It was fatuous to miss so little the fine perceptions one did n't have: so far from its showing experience it showed a sad simpicity not to *feel* Francie Dosson. He thanked God she was just the sort of imponderable infinite quantity, such as there were no stupid terms for, that he did feel. He did n't know what old frumps his father might have frequented — the style of 1830, with long curls in front, a vapid simper, a Scotch plaid dress and a *corsage*, in a point suggestive of twenty whalebones, coming down to the knees — but he could remember Mme. de Marignac's Tuesdays and Thursdays and Fridays, with Sundays and other days thrown in, and the taste that prevailed in that *milieu:* the books they admired, the verses they read and recited, the pictures, great heaven! they thought good, and the three busts of the lady of the house in different corners (as a Diana, a Druidess and a *Croyante:* her shoulders were supposed to make up for her head), effigies the public ridicule attaching to which to-day would — even the least bad, Canova's — make their authors burrow in holes for shame.

"And what else is she worth?" Mr. Probert asked after a momentary hesitation.

"How do you mean, what else?"

"Her immense prospects, that's what Susan has been putting forward. Susan's insistence on them was mainly what brought over Jane. Do you mind my speaking of them?"

Gaston was obliged to recognise privately the importance of Jane's having been brought over,

but he hated to hear it spoken of as if he were under an obligation to it. "To whom, sir?" he asked.

"Oh only to you."

"You can't do less than Mr. Dosson. As I told you, he waived the question of money and he was splendid. We can't be more mercenary than he."

"He waived the question of his own, you mean?" said Mr. Probert.

"Yes, and of yours. But it will be all right." The young man flattered himself that this was as near as he was willing to go to any view of pecuniary convenience.

"Well, it's your affair — or your sisters'," his father returned. "It's their idea that we see where we are and that we make the best of it."

"It's very good of them to make the best of it and I should think they'd be tired of their own chatter," Gaston impatiently sighed.

Mr. Probert looked at him a moment in vague surprise, but only said: "I think they are. However, the period of discussion's closed. We've taken the jump." He then added as to put the matter a little less dryly: "Alphonse and Maxime are quite of your opinion."

"Of my opinion?"

"That she's charming."

"Confound them then, I'm not of theirs!" The form of this rejoinder was childishly perverse, and it made Mr. Probert stare again; but it belonged to one of the reasons for which his children regarded him as an old darling that Gaston could suppose him after an instant to embrace it. The old man said

nothing, but took up his book, and his son, who had been standing before the fire, went out of the room. His abstention from protest at Gaston's petulance was the more generous as he was capable, for his part, of feeling it to make for a greater amenity in the whole connexion that *ces messieurs* should like the little girl at the hotel. Gaston did n't care a straw what it made for, and would have seen himself in bondage indeed had he given a second thought to the question. This was especially the case as his father's mention of the approval of two of his brothers-in-law appeared to point to a possible disapproval on the part of the third. Francie's lover cared as little whether she displeased M. de Brécourt as he cared whether she pleased Maxime and Raoul. Mr. Probert continued to read, and in a few moments Gaston was with him again. He had expressed surprise, just before, at the wealth of discussion his sisters had been ready to expend in his interest, but he managed to convey now that there was still a point of a certain importance to be made. "It seems rather odd to me that you should all appear to accept the step I'm about to take as a necessity disagreeable at the best, when I myself hold that I've been so exceedingly fortunate."

Mr. Probert lowered his book accommodatingly and rested his eyes on the fire. "You won't be content till we're enthusiastic. She seems an amiable girl certainly, and in that you're fortunate."

"I don't think you can tell me what would be better — what you'd have preferred," the young man said.

"What I should have preferred? In the first place you must remember that I was n't madly impatient to see you married."

"I can imagine that, and yet I can't imagine that as things have turned out you should n't be struck with my felicity. To get something so charming and to get it of our own species!" Gaston explained.

"Of our own species? *Tudieu!*" said his father, looking up.

"Surely it's infinitely fresher and more amusing for me to marry an American. There's a sad want of freshness — there's even a provinciality — in the way we've Gallicised."

"Against Americans I've nothing to say; some of them are the best thing the world contains. That's precisely why one can choose. They're far from being all like that."

"Like what, dear father?"

"*Comme ces gens-là.* You know that if they were French, being otherwise what they are, one would n't look at them."

"Indeed one would; they would be such rare curiosities."

"Well, perhaps they'll do for queer fish," said Mr. Probert with a little conclusive sigh.

"Yes, let them pass at that. They'll surprise you."

"Not too much, I hope!" cried the old man, opening his volume again.

The complexity of things among the Proberts, it need n't nevertheless startle us to learn, was such as to make it impossible for Gaston to proceed to the celebration of his nuptials, with all the needful cir-

cumstances of material preparation and social support, before some three months should have expired. He chafed however but moderately under this condition, for he remembered it would give Francie time to endear herself to his whole circle. It would also have advantages for the Dossons; it would enable them to establish by simple but effective arts some *modus vivendi* with that rigid body. It would in short help every one to get used to everything. Mr. Dosson's designs and Delia's took no articulate form; what was mainly clear to Gaston was that his future wife's relatives had as yet no sense of disconnexion. He knew that Mr. Dosson would do whatever Delia liked and that Delia would like to "start" her sister — this whether or no she expected to be present at the rest of the race. Mr. Probert notified Mr. Dosson of what he proposed to "do" for his son, and Mr. Dosson appeared more quietly amused than anything else at the news. He announced in return no intentions in regard to Francie, and his strange silence was the cause of another convocation of the house of Probert. Here Mme. de Brécourt's bold front won another victory; she maintained, as she let her brother know, that it was too late for any policy but a policy of confidence. "Lord help us, is that what they call confidence?" the young man gasped, guessing the way they all had looked at each other; and he wondered how they would look next at poor Mr. Dosson himself. Fortunately he could always fall back, for reassurance, on the perfection of their "forms"; though indeed he thoroughly knew that these forms would never appear so striking as

on the day — should such a day fatally come — of their meddling too much.

Mr. Probert's property was altogether in the United States: he resembled other discriminating persons for whom the only good taste in America was the taste of invested and paying capital. The provisions he was engaging to make for his son's marriage rendered advisable some attention, on the spot, to interests with the management of which he was acquainted only by report. It had long been his conviction that his affairs beyond the sea needed looking into; they had gone on and on for years too far from the master's eye. He had thought of making the journey in the cause of that vigilance, but now he was too old and too tired and the effort had become impossible. There was nothing therefore but for Gaston to go, and go quickly, though the time so little fostered his absence from Paris. The duty was none the less laid upon him and the question practically faced; then everything yielded to the consideration that he had best wait till after his marriage, when he might be so auspiciously accompanied by his wife. Francie would be in many ways so propitious an introducer. This abatement would have taken effect had not a call for an equal energy on Mr. Dosson's part suddenly appeared to reach and to move that gentleman. He had business on the other side, he announced, to attend to, though his starting for New York presented difficulties, since he could n't in such a situation leave his daughters alone. Not only would such a proceeding have given scandal to the Proberts, but Gaston learned, with much surprise and not a little amuse-

ment, that Delia, in consequence of changes now finely wrought in her personal philosophy, would n't have felt his doing so square with propriety. The young man was able to put it to her that nothing would be simpler than, in the interval, for Francie to go and stay with Susan or Margaret; she herself in that case would be free to accompany her father. But Delia declared at this that nothing would induce her to budge from Paris till she had seen her sister through, and Gaston shrank from proposing that she too should spend five weeks in the Place Beauvau or the Rue de Lille. There was moreover a slight element of the mystifying for him in the perverse unsociable way in which Francie took up a position of marked disfavour as yet to any "visiting." *After*, if he liked, but not till then. And she would n't at the moment give the reasons of her refusal; it was only very positive and even quite passionate.

All this left her troubled suitor no alternative but to say to Mr. Dosson: "I'm not, my dear sir, such a fool as I look. If you'll coach me properly, and trust me, why should n't I rush across and transact your business as well as my father's?" Strange as it appeared, Francie offered herself as accepting this separation from her lover, which would last six or seven weeks, rather than accept the hospitality of any member of his family. Mr. Dosson, on his side, was grateful for the solution; he remarked "Well, sir, you've got a big brain" at the end of a morning they spent with papers and pencils; and on this Gaston made his preparations to sail. Before he left Paris Francie, to do her justice, confided to him that her

objection to going in such an intimate way even to Mme. de Brécourt's had been founded on a fear that in close quarters she might do something that would make them all despise her. Gaston replied, in the first piace, ardently, that this was the very delirium of delicacy, and that he wanted to know in the second if she expected never to be at close quarters with "*tous les siens*." "Ah yes, but then it will be safer," she pleaded; "then we shall be married and by so much, shan't we? be beyond harm." In rejoinder to which he had simply kissed her; the passage taking place three days before her lover took ship. What further befell in the brief interval was that, stopping for a last word at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham on his way to catch the night express to London — he was to sail from Liverpool — Gaston found Mr. George Flack sitting in the red-satin saloon. The correspondent of the *Reverberator* had come back.

IX

Mr. Flack's relations with his old friends did n't indeed, after his return, take on the familiarity and frequency of their intercourse a year before: he was the first to refer to the marked change in the situation. They had got into the high set and they did n't care about the past: he alluded to the past as if it had been rich in mutual vows, in pledges now repudiated. "What's the matter all the same? Won't you come round there with us some day?" Mr. Dosson asked; not having perceived for himself any reason why the young journalist should n't be a welcome and easy presence in the Cours la Reine.

Delia wanted to know what Mr. Flack was talking about: did n't he know a lot of people that they did n't know and was n't it natural they should have their own society? The young man's treatment of the question was humorous, and it was with Delia that the discussion mainly went forward. When he maintained that the Dossons had shamelessly "shed" him Mr. Dosson returned "Well, I guess you'll grow again!" And Francie made the point that it was no use for him to pose as a martyr, since he knew perfectly well that with all the celebrated people he saw and the way he flew round he had the most enchanting time. She was aware of being a good deal less accessible than the previous spring, for Mesdames de Brécourt and de Cliché — the former indeed

more than the latter — occupied many of her hours. In spite of her having held off, to Gaston, from a premature intimacy with his sisters, she spent whole days in their company — they had so much to tell her of how her new life would shape, and it seemed mostly very pleasant — and she thought nothing could be nicer than that in these intervals he should give himself to her father, and even to Delia, as had been his wont.

But the flaw of a certain insincerity in Mr. Flack's nature was suggested by his present tendency to rare visits. He evidently did n't care for her father in himself, and though this mild parent always took what was set before him and never made fusses she was sure he felt their old companion to have fallen away. There were no more wanderings in public places, no more tryings of new cafés. Mr. Dosson used to look sometimes as he had looked of old when George Flack "located" them somewhere — as if he expected to see their heated benefactor rush back to them with his drab overcoat flying in the wind; but this appearance usually and rather touchingly subsided. He at any rate missed Gaston because Gaston had this winter so often ordered his dinner for him; and his society was not, to make it up, sought by the count and the marquis, whose mastery of English was small and their other distractions great. Mr. Probert, it was true, had shown something of a conversible spirit; he had come twice to the hotel since his son's departure and had said, smiling and reproachful, "You neglect us, you neglect us, my dear sir!" The good man had not understood what was meant by

this till Delia explained after the visitor had withdrawn, and even then the remedy for the neglect, administered two or three days later, had not borne any copious fruit. Mr. Dosson called alone, instructed by his daughter, in the Cours la Reine, but Mr. Probert was not at home. He only left a card on which Delia had superscribed in advance, almost with the legibility of print, the words "So sorry!" Her father had told her he would give in the card if she wanted, but would have nothing to do with the writing. There was a discussion as to whether Mr. Probert's remark was an allusion to a deficiency of politeness on the article of his sons-in-law. Ought n't Mr. Dosson perhaps to call personally, and not simply through the medium of the visits paid by his daughters to their wives, on Messieurs de Brécourt and de Cliché ? Once when this subject came up in George Flack's presence the old man said he would go round if Mr. Flack would accompany him. "All right, we'll go right along!" Mr. Flack had responded, and this inspiration had become a living fact qualified only by the "mercy," to Delia Dosson, that the other two gentlemen were not at home. "Suppose they *should* get in ?" she had said lugubriously to her sister.

"Well, what if they do ?" Francie had asked.

"Why the count and the marquis won't be interested in Mr. Flack."

"Well then perhaps he'll be interested in them. He can write something about them. They'll like that."

"Do you think they would ?" Delia had solemnly weighed it.

"Why, yes, if he should say fine things."

"They do like fine things," Delia had conceded. "They get off so many themselves. Only the way Mr. Flack does it's a different style."

"Well, people like to be praised in any style."

"That's so," Delia had continued to brood.

One afternoon, coming in about three o'clock, Mr. Flack found Francie alone. She had expressed a wish after luncheon for a couple of hours of independence: intending to write to Gaston, and having accidentally missed a post, she had determined her letter should be of double its usual length. Her companions had respected her claim for solitude, Mr. Dosson taking himself off to his daily session in the reading-room of the American bank and Delia — the girls had now at their command a landau as massive as the coach of an ambassador — driving away to the dressmaker's, a frequent errand, to superintend and urge forward the progress of her sister's wedding-clothes. Francie was not skilled in composition; she wrote slowly and had in thus addressing her lover much the same sense of sore tension she supposed she should have in standing at the altar with him. Her father and Delia had a theory that when she shut herself up that way she poured forth pages that would testify to her costly culture. When George Flack was ushered in at all events she was still bent over her blotting-book at one of the gilded tables, and there was an inkstain on her pointed forefinger. It was no disloyalty to Gaston, but only at the most an echo as of the sweetness of "recess time" in old school mornings that made her glad to see her visitor.

She had n't quite known how to finish her letter, in the infinite of the bright propriety of her having written it, but Mr. Flack seemed to set a practical human limit.

"I would n't have ventured," he observed on entering, "to propose this, but I guess I can do with it now it's come."

"What can you do with?" she asked, wiping her pen.

"Well this happy chance. Just you and me together."

"I don't know what it's a chance for."

"Well, for me to be a little less miserable for a quarter of an hour. It makes me so to see you look so happy."

"It makes you miserable?" — Francie took it gaily but guardedly.

"You ought to understand — when I say something so noble." And settling himself on the sofa Mr. Flack continued: "Well, how do you get on without Mr. Probert?"

"Very well indeed, thank you."

The tone in which the girl spoke was not an encouragement to free pleasantry, so that if he continued his enquiries it was with as much circumspection as he had perhaps ever in his life recognised himself as having to apply to a given occasion. He was eminently capable of the sense that it was n't in his interest to strike her as indiscreet and profane; he only wanted still to appear a real reliable "gentleman friend." At the same time he was not indifferent to the profit for him of her noticing in him a sense as of a

good fellow once badly "sold," which would always give him a certain pull on what he called to himself her lovely character. "Well, you're in the real 'grand' old *monde* now, I suppose," he resumed at last, not with an air of undue derision — rather with a kind of contemporary but detached wistfulness.

"Oh I'm not in anything; I'm just where I've always been."

"I'm sorry; I hoped you'd tell me a good lot about it," said Mr. Flack, not with levity.

"You think too much of that. What do you want to know so much about it for?"

Well, he took some trouble for his reason. "Dear Miss Francie, a poor devil of a journalist who has to get his living by studying-up things has to think *too* much, sometimes, in order to think, or at any rate to do, enough. We find out what we can — *as* we can, you see."

She did seem to catch in it the note of pathos. "What do you want to study-up?"

"Everything! I take in everything. It all depends on my opportunity. I try and learn — I try and improve. Every one has something to tell — or to sell; and I listen and watch — well, for what I can drink in or can buy. I hoped *you'd* have something to tell — for I'm not talking now of anything but *that*. I don't believe but what you've seen a good deal of new life. You won't pretend they ain't working you right in, charming as you are."

"Do you mean if they've been kind and sweet to me? They've been very kind and sweet," Francie said. "They want to do even more than I'll let them."

"Ah why won't you let them?" George Flack asked almost coaxingly.

"Well, I do, when it comes to anything," the girl went on. "You can't resist them really; they've got such lovely ways."

"I should like to hear you talk right out about their ways," her companion observed after a silence.

"Oh I could talk out right enough if once I were to begin. But I don't see why it should interest you."

"Don't I care immensely for everything that concerns you? Did n't I tell you that once?" — he put it very straight.

"Well, you were foolish ever, and you'd be foolish to say it again," Francie replied.

"Oh I don't want to say anything, I've had my lesson. But I could listen to you all day." Francie gave an exclamation of impatience and incredulity, and Mr. Flack pursued: "Don't you remember what you told me that time we had that talk at Saint-Germain, on the terrace? You said I might remain your friend."

"Well, that's all right," said the girl.

"Then ain't we interested in the development of our friends — in their impressions, their situations and adventures? Especially a person like me, who has got to know life whether he wants to or not — who has got to know the world."

"Do you mean to say I could teach you about life?" Francie beautifully gaped.

"About some kinds certainly. You know a lot of people it's difficult to get at unless one takes some extraordinary measures, as you've done."

"What do you mean? What measures have I taken?"

"Well, *they* have — to get right hold of you — and it's the same thing. Pouncing on you, to secure you first — I call that energetic, and don't you think I ought to know?" smiled Mr. Flack with much meaning. "I thought *I* was energetic, but they got in ahead of me. They're a society apart, and they must be very curious."

"Yes, they're very curious," Francie admitted with a resigned sigh. Then she said: "Do you want to put them in the paper?"

George Flack cast about — the air of the question was so candid, suggested so complete an exemption from prejudice. "Oh I'm very careful about what I put in the paper. I want everything, as I told you; don't you remember the sketch I gave you of my ideals? But I want it in the right way and of the right brand. If I can't get it in the shape I like it I don't want it at all; first-rate first-hand information, straight from the tap, is what I'm after. I don't want to hear what some one or other thinks that some one or other was told that some one or other believed or said; and above all I don't want to print it. There's plenty of that flowing in, and the best part of the job 's to keep it out. People just yearn to come in; they make love to me for it all over the place; there's the biggest crowd at the door. But I say to them: 'You've got to do something first, then I'll see; or at any rate you've got to *be* something!'"

"We sometimes see the *Reverberator*. You 've some fine pieces," Francie humanely replied.

"Sometimes only? Don't they send it to the old gentleman — the weekly edition? I thought I had fixed that," said George Flack.

"I don't know; it's usually lying round. But Delia reads it more than I; she reads pieces aloud. I like to read books; I read as many as I can."

"Well, it's all literature," said Mr. Flack; "it's all the press, the great institution of our time. Some of the finest books have come out first in the papers. It's the history of the age."

"I see you've got the same aspirations," Francie remarked kindly.

"The same aspirations?"

"Those you told me about that day at Saint-Germain."

"Oh I keep forgetting that I ever broke out to you that way. Everything's so changed."

"Are you the proprietor of the paper now?" the girl went on, determined not to catch this sentimental echo.

"What do you care? It would n't even be delicate in me to tell you; for I *do* remember the way you said you'd try and get your father to help me. Don't say you've forgotten it, because you almost made me cry. Anyway, that is n't the sort of help I want now and it was n't the sort of help I meant to ask you for then. I want sympathy and interest; I want some one to say to me once in a while 'Keep up your old heart, Mr. Flack; you'll come out all right.' You see I'm a working-man and I don't pretend to be anything else," Francie's companion went on. "I don't live on the accumulations of my ancestors. What I have I earn

— what I am I've fought for: I'm a real old *travailleur*, as they say here. I rejoice in it, but there 's one dark spot in it all the same."

"And what 's that?" Francie decided not quite at once to ask.

"That it makes you ashamed of me."

"Oh how can you say?" And she got up as if a sense of oppression, of vague discomfort, had come over her. Her visitor troubled such peace as she had lately arrived at.

"You would n't be ashamed to go round with me?"

"Round where?"

"Well, anywhere: just to have one more walk. The very last." George Flack had got up too and stood there looking at her with his bright eyes, his hands in the pockets of his overcoat. As she hesitated he continued: "Then I'm not such a friend after all."

She rested her eyes a moment on the carpet; then raising them: "Where would you like to go?"

"You could render me a service — a real service — without any inconvenience probably to yourself. Is n't your portrait finished?"

"Yes, but he won't give it up."

"Who won't give it up?"

"Why Mr. Waterlow. He wants to keep it near him to look at it in case he should take a fancy to change it. But I hope he won't change it — it's so lovely as it is!" Francie made a mild joke of saying.

"I hear it's magnificent and I want to see it," said George Flack.

"Then why don't you go?"

"I'll go if you'll take me; that's the service you can render me."

"Why I thought you went everywhere — into the palaces of kings!" Francie cried.

"I go where I'm welcome, not where I ain't. I don't want to push into that studio alone; he does n't want me round. Oh you need n't protest," the young man went on; "if a fellow's made sensitive he has got to stay so. I feel those things in the shade of a tone of voice. He does n't like newspaper-men. Some people don't, you know. I ought to tell you that frankly."

Francie considered again, but looking this time at her visitor. "Why if it had n't been for you" — I'm afraid she said "had n't have been" — "I'd never have sat to him."

Mr. Flack smiled at her in silence for a little. "If it had n't been for me I think you'd never have met your future husband."

"Perhaps not," said Francie; and suddenly she blushed red, rather to her companion's surprise.

"I only say that to remind you that after all I've a right to ask you to show me this one little favour. Let me drive with you to-morrow, or next day or any day, to the Avenue de Villiers, and I shall regard myself as amply repaid. With you I shan't be afraid to go in, for you've a right to take any one you like to see your picture. That's the rule here."

"Oh the day you're afraid, Mr. Flack —!" Francie laughed without fear. She had been much struck by his reminder of what they all owed him; for he truly had been their initiator, the instrument, under providence, that had opened a great new interest to them,

and as she was more listless about almost anything than at the sight of a person wronged she winced at his describing himself as disavowed or made light of after the prize was gained. Her mind had not lingered on her personal indebtedness to him, for it was not in the nature of her mind to linger; but at present she was glad to spring quickly, at the first word, into the attitude of acknowledgement. It had the effect of a simplification after too multiplied an appeal — it brought up her spirits.

"Of course I must be quite square with you," the young man said in a tone that struck her as "higher," somehow, than any she had ever heard him use. "If I want to see the picture it's because I want to write about it. The whole thing will go bang into the *Reverberator*. You must understand that in advance. I would n't write about it without seeing it. We don't *do* that" — and Mr. Flack appeared to speak proudly again for his organ.

"*J'espère bien!*" said Francie, who was getting on famously with her French. "Of course if you praise him Mr. Waterlow will like it."

"I don't know that he cares for my praise and I don't care much whether *he* likes it or not. For you to like it's the principal thing — we must do with that."

"Oh I shall be awfully proud."

"I shall speak of you personally — I shall say you're the prettiest girl that has ever come over."

"You may say what you like," Francie returned. "It will be immense fun to be in the newspapers. Come for me at this hour day after to-morrow."

"You're too kind," said George Flack, taking up

his hat. He smoothed it down a moment with his glove; then he said: "I wonder if you 'll mind our going alone?"

"Alone?"

"I mean just you and me."

"Oh don't you be afraid! Father and Delia have seen it about thirty times."

"That 'll be first-rate. And it will help me to feel, more than anything else could make me do, that we 're still old friends. I could n't bear the end of *that.* I 'll come at 3.15," Mr. Flack went on, but without even yet taking his departure. He asked two or three questions about the hotel, whether it were as good as last year and there were many people in it and they could keep their rooms warm; then pursued suddenly, on a different plane and scarcely waiting for the girl's answer: "And now for instance are they very bigoted? That 's one of the things I should like to know."

"Very bigoted?"

"Ain't they tremendous Catholics — always talking about the Holy Father; what they call here the throne and the altar? And don't they want the throne too? I mean Mr. Probert, the old gentleman," Mr. Flack added. "And those grand ladies and all the rest of them."

"They 're very religious," said Francie. "They 're the most religious people I ever saw. They just adore the Holy Father. They know him personally quite well. They 're always going down to Rome."

"And do they mean to introduce you to him?"

"How do you mean, to introduce me?"

"Why to make you a Catholic, to take you also down to Rome."

"Oh we're going to Rome for our *voyage de noces!*" said Francie gaily. "Just for a peep."

"And won't you have to have a Catholic marriage? They won't consent to a Protestant one."

"We're going to have a lovely one, just like one that Mme. de Brécourt took me to see at the Madeleine."

"And will it be at the Madeleine, too?"

"Yes, unless we have it at Notre Dame."

"And how will your father and sister like that?"

"Our having it at Notre Dame?"

"Yes, or at the Madeleine. Your not having it at the American church."

"Oh Delia wants it at the best place," said Francie simply. Then she added: "And you know poppa ain't much on religion."

"Well now that's what I call a genuine fact, the sort I was talking about," Mr. Flack replied. Whereupon he at last took himself off, repeating that he would come in two days later, at 3.15 sharp.

Francie gave an account of his visit to her sister, on the return of the latter young lady, and mentioned the agreement they had come to in relation to the drive. Delia brooded on it a while like a sitting hen, so little did she know that it was right ("as" it was right Delia usually said) that Francie should be so intimate with other gentlemen after she was engaged.

"Intimate? You would n't think it's very intimate if you were to see me!" Francie cried with amusement.

"I'm sure I don't want to see you," Delia declared

— the sharpness of which made her sister suddenly strenuous.

"Delia Dosson, do you realise that if it had n't been for Mr. Flack we would never have had that picture, and that if it had n't been for that picture I should never have got engaged?"

"It would have been better if you had n't, if that 's the way you 're going to behave. Nothing would induce me to go with you."

This was what suited Francie, but she was nevertheless struck by Delia's rigour. "I 'm only going to take him to see Mr. Waterlow."

"Has he become all of a sudden too shy to go alone?"

"Well, you know Mr. Waterlow has a prejudice against him and has made him feel it. You know Gaston told us so."

"He told us *he* could n't bear him; that 's what he told us," said Delia.

"All the more reason I should be kind to him. Why Delia, do realise," Francie went on.

"That 's just what I do," returned the elder girl; "but things that are very different from those you want me to. You have queer reasons."

"I 've others too that you may like better. He wants to put a piece in the paper about it."

"About your picture?"

"Yes, and about me. All about the whole thing."

Delia stared a moment. "Well, I hope it will be a good one!" she said with a groan of oppression as from the crushing majesty of their fate.

X

When Francie, two days later, passed with Mr. Flack into Charles Waterlow's studio she found Mme. de Cliché before the great canvas. She enjoyed every positive sign that the Proberts took an interest in her, and this was a considerable symptom, Gaston's second sister's coming all that way — she lived over by the Invalides — to look at the portrait once more. Francie knew she had seen it at an earlier stage; the work had excited curiosity and discussion among the Proberts from the first of their making her acquaintance, when they went into considerations about it which had not occurred to the original and her companions — frequently as, to our knowledge, these good people had conversed on the subject. Gaston had told her that opinions differed much in the family as to the merit of the work, and that Margaret, precisely, had gone so far as to say that it might be a masterpiece of tone but did n't make her look like a lady. His father on the other hand had no objection to offer to the character in which it represented her, but he did n't think it well painted. "*Regardez-moi ça, et ça, et ça, je vous demande!*" he had exclaimed, making little dashes at the canvas with his glove, toward mystifying spots, on occasions when the artist was not at hand. The Proberts always fell into French when they spoke on a question of art. "Poor dear papa, he only understands *le vieux jeu!*" Gaston had ex-

plained, and he had still further to expound what he meant by the old game. The brand-newness of Charles Waterlow's game had already been a bewilderment to Mr. Probert.

Francie remembered now — she had forgotten it — Margaret de Cliché's having told her she meant to come again. She hoped the marquise thought by this time that, on canvas at least, she looked a little more like a lady. Mme. de Cliché smiled at her at any rate and kissed her, as if in fact there could be no mistake. She smiled also at Mr. Flack, on Francie's introducing him, and only looked grave when, after she had asked where the others were — the papa and the *grande sœur* — the girl replied that she had n't the least idea: her party consisted only of herself and Mr. Flack. Then Mme. de Cliché's grace stiffened, taking on a shade that brought back Francie's sense that she was the individual, among all Gaston's belongings, who had pleased her least from the first. Mme. de Douves was superficially more formidable, but with her the second impression was comparatively comforting. It was just this second impression of the marquise that was not. There were perhaps others behind it, but the girl had n't yet arrived at them. Mr. Waterlow might n't have been very much prepossessed with Mr. Flack, but he was none the less perfectly civil to him and took much trouble to show him the work he had in hand, dragging out canvases, changing lights, moving him off to see things at the other end of the great room. While the two gentlemen were at a distance Mme. de Cliché expressed to Francie the conviction that she would

allow her to see her home: on which Francie replied that she was not going home, but was going somewhere else with Mr. Flack. And she explained, as if it simplified the matter, that this gentleman was a big editor.

Her sister-in-law that was to be echoed the term and Francie developed her explanation. He was not the only big editor, but one of the many big editors, of an enormous American paper. He was going to publish an article — as big, as enormous, as all the rest of the business — about her portrait. Gaston knew him perfectly: it was Mr. Flack who had been the cause of Gaston's being presented to her. Mme. de Cliché looked across at him as if the inadequacy of the cause projected an unfavourable light upon an effect hitherto perhaps not exactly measured; she appealed as to whether Francie thought Gaston would like her to drive about Paris alone with one of *ces messieurs*. "I'm sure I don't know. I never asked him!" said Francie. "He ought to want me to be polite to a person who did so much for us." Soon after this Mme. de Cliché retired with no fresh sign of any sense of the existence of Mr. Flack, though he stood in her path as she approached the door. She did n't kiss our young lady again, and the girl observed that her leave-taking consisted of the simple words "Adieu mademoiselle." She had already noted that in proportion as the Proberts became majestic they became articulately French.

She and Mr. Flack remained in the studio but a short time longer, and when they were seated in the carriage again, at the door — they had come in Mr.

Dosson's open landau — her companion said "And now where shall we go?" He spoke as if on their way from the hotel he had n't touched upon the pleasant vision of a little turn in the Bois. He had insisted then that the day was made on purpose, the air full of spring. At present he seemed to wish to give himself the pleasure of making his companion choose that particular alternative. But she only answered rather impatiently:

"Wherever you like, wherever you like!" And she sat there swaying her parasol, looking about her, giving no order.

"Au Bois," said George Flack to the coachman, leaning back on the soft cushions. For a few moments after the carriage had taken its easy elastic start they were silent; but he soon began again. "Was that lady one of your new relatives?"

"Do you mean one of Mr. Probert's old ones? She's his sister."

"Is there any particular reason in that why she should n't say good-morning to me?"

"She did n't want you to remain with me. She does n't like you to go round with me. She wanted to carry me off."

"What has she got against me?" Mr. Flack asked with a kind of portentous calm.

Francie seemed to consider a little. "Oh it's these funny French ideas."

"Funny? Some of them are very base," said George Flack.

His companion made no answer; she only turned her eyes to right and left, admiring the splendid day

and shining city. The great architectural vista was fair: the tall houses, with their polished shop-fronts, their balconies, their signs with accented letters, seemed to make a glitter of gilt and crystal as they rose in the sunny air. The colour of everything was cool and pretty and the sound of everything gay; the sense of a costly spectacle was everywhere. "Well, I like Paris anyway!" Francie exhaled at last with her little harmonising flatness.

"It's lucky for you, since you've got to live here."

"I have n't got to; there's no obligation. We have n't settled anything about that."

"Has n't that lady settled it for you?"

"Yes, very likely she has," said Francie placidly enough. "I don't like her so well as the others."

"You like the others very much?"

"Of course I do. So would you if they had made so much of you."

"That one at the studio did n't make much of me, certainly," Mr. Flack declared.

"Yes, she's the most haughty," Francie allowed.

"Well, what is it all about?" her friend demanded. "Who are they anyway?"

"Oh it would take me three hours to tell you," the girl cheerfully sighed. "They go back a thousand years."

"Well, we've *got* a thousand years — I mean three hours." And George Flack settled himself more on his cushions and inhaled the pleasant air. "I *am* getting something out of this drive, Miss Francie," he went on. "It's many a day since I've been to the old Bois. I don't fool round much in woods."

Francie replied candidly that for her too the occasion was most agreeable, and Mr. Flack pursued, looking round him with his hard smile, irrelevantly but sociably: "Yes, these French ideas! I don't see how you can stand them. Those they have about young ladies are horrid."

"Well, they tell me you like them better after you 're married."

"Why after they 're married they 're worse — I mean the ideas. Every one knows that."

"Well, they can make you like anything, the way they talk," Francie said.

"And do they talk a great deal?"

"Well, I should think so. They don't do much else, and all about the queerest things — things I never heard of."

"Ah *that* I'll bet my life on!" Mr. Flack returned with understanding.

"Of course," his companion obligingly proceeded, "I've had most conversation with Mr. Probert."

"The old gentleman?"

"No, very little with him. I mean with Gaston. But it's not he that has told me most — it's Mme. de Brécourt. She's great on life, on *their* life — it's very interesting. She has told me all their histories, all their troubles and complications."

"Complications?" Mr. Flack threw off.

"That's what she calls them. It seems very different from America. It's just like a beautiful story — they have such strange feelings. But there are things you can see — without being told."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, like Mme. de Cliché's —" But Francie paused as if for a word.

Her friend was prompt with assistance. "Do you mean her complications?"

"Yes, and her husband's. She has terrible ones. That's why one must forgive her if she's rather peculiar. She's very unhappy."

"Do you mean through her husband?"

"Yes, he likes other ladies better. He flirts with Mme. de Brives."

Mr. Flack's hand closed over it. "Mme. de Brives?"

"Yes, she's lovely," said Francie. "She ain't very young, but she's fearfully attractive. And he used to go every day to have tea with Mme. de Villepreux. Mme. de Cliché can't bear Mme. de Villepreux."

"Well, he seems a kind of *mean* man," George Flack moralised.

"Oh his mother was very bad. That was one thing they had against the marriage."

"Who had? — against what marriage?"

"When Maggie Probert became engaged."

"Is that what they call her — Maggie?"

"Her brother does; but every one else calls her Margot. Old Mme. de Cliché had a horrid reputation. Every one hated her."

"Except those, I suppose, who liked her too much!" Mr. Flack permitted himself to guess. "And who's Mme. de Villepreux?" he proceeded.

"She's the daughter of Mme. de Marignac."

"And who's *that* old sinner?" the young man asked.

"Oh I guess she's dead," said Francie. "She used to be a great friend of Mr. Probert — of Gaston's father."

"He used to go to tea with her?"

"Almost every day. Susan says he has never been the same since her death."

"The way they do come out with 'em!" Mr. Flack chuckled. "And who the mischief's Susan?"

"Why Mme. de Brécourt. Mr. Probert just loved Mme. de Marignac. Mme. de Villepreux is n't so nice as her mother. She was brought up with the Proberts, like a sister, and now she carries on with Maxime."

"With Maxime?"

"That's M. de Cliché."

"Oh I see — I see!" and George Flack engulfed it. They had reached the top of the Champs Elysées and were passing below the wondrous arch to which that gentle eminence forms a pedestal and which looks down even on splendid Paris from its immensity and across at the vain mask of the Tuileries and the river-moated Louvre and the twin towers of Notre Dame painted blue by the distance. The confluence of carriages — a sounding stream in which our friends became engaged — rolled into the large avenue leading to the Bois de Boulogne. Mr. Flack evidently enjoyed the scene; he gazed about him at their neighbours, at the villas and gardens on either hand; he took in the prospect of the far-stretching brown boskages and smooth alleys of the wood, of the hour they had yet to spend there, of the rest of Francie's pleasant prattle, of the place near the lake where they could alight and

walk a little; even of the bench where they might sit down. "I see, I see," he repeated with appreciation. "You make me feel quite as if I were in the grand old *monde*."

XI

One day at noon, shortly before the time for which Gaston had announced his return, a note was brought Francie from Mme. de Brécourt. It caused her some agitation, though it contained a clause intended to guard her against vain fears. "Please come to me the moment you've received this — I've sent the carriage. I'll explain when you get here what I want to see you about. Nothing has happened to Gaston. We are all here." The coupé from the Place Beauvau was waiting at the door of the hotel, and the girl had but a hurried conference with her father and sister — if conference it could be called in which vagueness on the one side melted into blankness on the other. "It's for something bad — something bad," Francie none the less said while she tied her bonnet, though she was unable to think what it could be. Delia, who looked a good deal scared, offered to accompany her; on which Mr. Dosson made the first remark of a practical character in which he had indulged in relation to his daughter's alliance.

"No you won't — no you won't, my dear. They may whistle for Francie, but let them see that they can't whistle for all of us." It was the first sign he had given of being jealous of the dignity of the Dossons. That question had never troubled him.

"I know what it is," said Delia while she arranged her sister's garments. "They want to talk about re-

ligion. They've got the priests; there's some bishop or perhaps some cardinal. They want to baptise you."

"Then you'd better take a waterproof!" Francie's father called after her as she flitted away.

She wondered, rolling toward the Place Beauvau, what they were all there for; that announcement balanced against the reassurance conveyed in the phrase about Gaston. She liked them individually, but in their collective form they made her uneasy. In their family parties there was always something of the tribunal. Mme. de Brécourt came out to meet her in the vestibule, drawing her quickly into a small room — not the salon; Francie knew it as her hostess's "own room," a lovely boudoir — in which, considerably to the girl's relief, the rest of the family were not assembled. Yet she guessed in a moment that they were near at hand — they were waiting. Susan looked flushed and strange; she had a queer smile; she kissed her as if she did n't know she was doing it. She laughed as she greeted her, but her laugh was extravagant; it was a different demonstration every way from any Francie had hitherto had to reckon with. By the time our young lady had noted these things she was sitting beside her on a sofa and Mme. de Brécourt had her hand, which she held so tight that it almost hurt her. Susan's eyes were in their nature salient, but on this occasion they seemed to have started out of her head.

"We're upside down — terribly agitated. A thunderbolt has fallen on the house."

"What's the matter — what's the matter?" Francie asked, pale and with parted lips. She had a sudden wild idea that Gaston might have found out in Amer-

ica that her father had no money, had lost it all; that it had been stolen during their long absence. But would he cast her off for that?

"You must understand the closeness of our union with you from our sending for you this way — the first, the only person — in a crisis. Our joys are your joys and our indignations are yours."

"What *is* the matter, *please?*" the girl repeated. Their "indignations" opened up a gulf; it flashed upon her, with a shock of mortification for the belated idea, that something would have come out: a piece in the paper, from Mr. Flack, about her portrait and even a little about herself. But that was only more mystifying, for certainly Mr. Flack could only have published something pleasant — something to be proud of. Had he by some incredible perversity or treachery stated that the picture was bad, or even that *she* was? She grew dizzy, remembering how she had refused him, and how little he had liked it, that day at Saint-Germain. But they had made that up over and over, especially when they sat so long on a bench together (the time they drove) in the Bois de Boulogne.

"Oh the most awful thing; a newspaper sent this morning from America to my father — containing two horrible columns of vulgar lies and scandal about our family, about all of us, about you, about your picture, about poor Marguerite, calling her 'Margot,' about Maxime and Léonie de Villepreux, saying he's her lover, about all our affairs, about Gaston, about your marriage, about your sister and your dresses and your dimples, about our darling father, whose history

it professes to relate in the most ignoble, the most revolting terms. Papa's in the most awful state!" and Mme. de Brécourt panted to take breath. She had spoken with the volubility of horror and passion. "You're outraged with us and you must suffer with us," she went on. "But who has done it? Who has done it? Who has done it?"

"Why Mr. Flack — Mr. Flack!" Francie quickly replied. She was appalled, overwhelmed; but her foremost feeling was the wish not to appear to disavow her knowledge.

"Mr. Flack? do you mean that awful person —? He ought to be shot, he ought to be burnt alive. Maxime will kill him, Maxime's in an unspeakable rage. Everything's at end, we've been served up to the rabble, we shall have to leave Paris. How could he know such things? — and they all so infamously false!" The poor woman poured forth her woe in questions, contradictions, lamentations; she did n't know what to ask first, against what to protest. "Do you mean that wretch Marguerite saw you with at Mr. Waterlow's? Oh Francie, what has happened? She had a feeling then, a dreadful foreboding. She saw you afterwards — walking with him — in the Bois."

"Well, I did n't see her," the girl said.

"You were talking with him — you were too absorbed: that's what Margot remembers. Oh Francie, Francie!" wailed Mme. de Brécourt, whose distress was pitiful.

"She tried to interfere at the studio, but I would n't let her. He's an old friend — a friend of poppa's —

and I like him very much. What my father allows, that's not for others to criticise!" Francie continued. She was frightened, extremely frightened, at her companion's air of tragedy and at the dreadful consequences she alluded to, consequences of an act she herself didn't know, couldn't comprehend nor measure yet. But there was an instinct of bravery in her which threw her into blind defence, defence even of George Flack, though it was a part of her consternation that on her too he should have practised a surprise — it would appear to be some self-seeking deception.

"Oh how can you bear with such brutes, how can your father — ? What devil has he paid to tattle to him ?"

"You scare me awfully — you terrify me," the girl could but plead. "I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't seen it, I don't understand it. Of course I've talked to Mr. Flack."

"Oh Francie, don't say it — don't *say* it! Dear child, you haven't talked to him in that fashion: vulgar horrors and such a language!" Mme. de Brécourt came nearer, took both her hands now, drew her closer, seemed to supplicate her for some disproof, some antidote to the nightmare. "You shall see the paper; they've got it in the other room — the most disgusting sheet. Margot's reading it to her husband; he can't read English, if you can call it English: such a style of the gutter! Papa tried to translate it to Maxime, but he couldn't, he was too sick. There's a quantity about Mme. de Marignac — imagine only! And a quantity about Jeanne and

Raoul and their economies in the country. When they see it in Brittany — heaven preserve us!"

Francie had turned very white; she looked for a minute at the carpet. "And what does it say about me?"

"Some trash about your being the great American beauty, with the most odious details, and your having made a match among the 'rare old exclusives.' And the strangest stuff about your father — his having gone into a 'store' at the age of twelve. And something about your poor sister — heaven help us! And a sketch of our career in Paris, as they call it, and the way we've pushed and got on and our ridiculous pretensions. And a passage about Blanche de Douves, Raoul's sister, who had that disease — what do they call it? — that she used to steal things in shops: do you see them reading *that?* And how did he know such a thing? It's ages ago, it's dead and buried!"

"You told me, you told me yourself," said Francie quickly. She turned red the instant she had spoken.

"Don't say it's *you* — don't, don't, my darling!" cried Mme. de Brécourt, who had stared and glared at her. "That's what I want, that's what you must do, that's what I see you this way for first alone. I've answered for you, you know; you must repudiate the remotest connexion; you must deny it up to the hilt. Margot suspects you — she has got that idea — she has given it to the others. I've told them they ought to be ashamed, that it's an outrage to all we know you and love you for. I've done everything for the last hour to protect you. I'm your god-

mother, you know, and you must n't disappoint me. You're incapable, and you must say so, face to face, to my father. Think of Gaston, chérie; *he'll* have seen it over there, alone, far from us all. Think of *his* horror and of *his* anguish and of *his* faith, of what *he* would expect of you." Mme. de Brécourt hurried on, and her companion's bewilderment deepened to see how the tears had risen to her eyes and were pouring down her cheeks. "You must say to my father, face to face, that you're incapable — that you're stainless."

"Stainless?" Francie bleated it like a bewildered interrogative lamb. But the sheep-dog had to be faced. "Of course I knew he wanted to write a piece about the picture — and about my marriage."

"About your marriage — of course you knew? Then, wretched girl, you 're at the bottom of *all!*" cried Mme. de Brécourt, flinging herself away, falling back on the sofa, prostrate there and covering her face with her hands.

"He told me — he told me when I went with him to the studio!" Francie asseverated loud. "But he seems to have printed more."

"*More?* I should think so!" And Mme. de Brécourt rebounded, standing before her. "And you *let* him — about yourself? You gave him preposterous facts?"

"I told him — I told him — I don't know what. It was for his paper — he wants everything. It's a very fine paper," said the girl.

"A very fine paper?" Mme. de Brécourt flushed, with parted lips. "Have you *seen*, have you touched

the hideous sheet? Ah my brother, my brother!" she quavered again, turning away.

"If your brother were here you would n't talk to me this way — he 'd protect me, Gaston would!" cried Francie, on her feet, seizing her little muff and moving to the door.

"Go away, go away or they 'll kill you!" her friend went on excitedly. "After all I've done for you — after the way I've lied for you!" And she sobbed, trying to repress her sobs.

Francie, at this, broke out into a torrent of tears. "I'll go home. Poppa, poppa!" she almost shrieked, reaching the door.

"Oh your father — he has been a nice father, bringing you up in such ideas!" These words followed her with infinite scorn, but almost as Mme. de Brécourt uttered them, struck by a sound, she sprang after the girl, seized her, drew her back and held her a moment listening before she could pass out. "Hush — hush — they 're coming in here, they 're too anxious! Deny — deny it — say you know nothing! Your sister must have said things — and such things: say it all comes from *her!*"

"Oh you dreadful — is that what *you* do?" cried Francie, shaking herself free. The door opened as she spoke and Mme. de Brécourt walked quickly to the window, turning her back. Mme. de Cliché was there and Mr. Probert and M. de Brécourt and M. de Cliché. They entered in silence and M. de Brécourt, coming last, closed the door softly behind him. Francie had never been in a court of justice, but if she had had that experience these four persons would have

reminded her of the jury filing back into their box with their verdict. They all looked at her hard as she stood in the middle of the room; Mme. de Brécourt gazed out of the window, wiping her tears; Mme. de Cliché grasped a newspaper, crumpled and partly folded. Francie got a quick impression, moving her eyes from one face to another, that old Mr. Probert was the worst; his mild ravaged expression was terrible. He was the one who looked at her least; he went to the fireplace and leaned on the mantel with his head in his hands. He seemed ten years older.

"Ah mademoiselle, mademoiselle, mademoiselle!" said Maxime de Cliché slowly, impressively, in a tone of the most respectful but most poignant reproach.

"Have you seen it — have they sent it to you?" his wife asked, thrusting the paper toward her. "It's quite at your service!" But as Francie neither spoke nor took it she tossed it upon the sofa, where, as it opened, falling, the girl read the name of the *Reverberator*. Mme. de Cliché carried her head very far aloft.

"She has nothing to do with it — it's just as I told you — she's overwhelmed," said Mme. de Brécourt, remaining at the window.

"You'd do well to read it — it's worth the trouble," Alphonse de Brécourt remarked, going over to his wife. Francie saw him kiss her as he noted her tears. She was angry at her own; she choked and swallowed them; they seemed somehow to put her in the wrong.

"Have you had no idea that any such monstrosity would be perpetrated?" Mme. de Cliché went on, coming nearer to her. She had a manner of forced

calmness — as if she wished it to be understood that she was one of those who could be reasonable under any provocation, though she were trembling within — which made Francie draw back. "*C'est pourtant rempli de choses* — which we know you to have been told of — by what folly, great heaven! It's right and left — no one's spared — it's a deluge of the lowest insult. My sister perhaps will have told you of the apprehensions I had — I could n't resist them, though I thought of nothing so awful as this, God knows — the day I met you at Mr. Waterlow's with your journalist."

"I've told her everything — don't you see she's *anéantie?* Let her go, let her go!" cried Mme. de Brécourt all distrustfully and still at the window.

"Ah your journalist, your journalist, mademoiselle!" said Maxime de Cliché. "I'm very sorry to have to say anything in regard to any friend of yours that can give you so little pleasure; but I promise myself the satisfaction of administering him with these hands a dressing he won't forget, if I may trouble you so far as to ask you to let him know it!"

M. de Cliché fingered the points of his moustache; he diffused some powerful scent; his eyes were dreadful to Francie. She wished Mr. Probert would say something kind to her; but she had now determined to be strong. They were ever so many against one; Gaston was far away and she felt heroic. "If you mean Mr. Flack — I don't know what you mean," she said as composedly as possible to M. de Cliché. "Mr. Flack has gone to London."

At this M. de Brécourt gave a free laugh and his

brother-in-law replied: "Ah it's easy to go to London."

"They like such things there; they do them more and more. It's as bad as America!" Mme. de Cliché declared.

"Why have you sent for me — what do you all want me to do? You might explain — I'm only an American girl!" said Francie, whose being only an American girl did n't prevent her pretty head from holding itself now as high as Mme. de Cliché's.

Mme. de Brécourt came back to her quickly, laying her hand on her arm. "You're very nervous — you'd much better go home. I'll explain everything to them — I'll make them understand. The carriage is here — it had orders to wait."

"I'm not in the least nervous, but I've made you all so," Francie brought out with the highest spirit.

"I defend you, my dear young lady — I insist that you're only a wretched victim like ourselves," M. de Brécourt remarked, approaching her with a smile. "I see the hand of a woman in it, you know," he went on to the others; "for there are strokes of a vulgarity that a man does n't sink to — he can't, his very organisation prevents him — even if he be the *dernier des goujats*. But please don't doubt that I've maintained that woman not to be you."

"The way you talk! *I* don't know how to write," Francie impatiently quavered.

"My poor child, when one knows you as I do —!" murmured Mme. de Brécourt with an arm round her.

"There's a lady who helps him — Mr. Flack has

told me so," the girl continued. "She's a literary lady — here in Paris — she writes what he tells her. I think her name's Miss Topping, but she calls herself Florine — or Dorine," Francie added.

"Miss Dosson, you're too rare!" Marguerite de Cliché exclaimed, giving a long moan of pain which ended in an incongruous laugh. "Then you've been three to it," she went on; "that accounts for its perfection!"

Francie disengaged herself again from Mme. de Brécourt and went to Mr. Probert, who stood looking down at the fire with his back to her. "Mr. Probert, I'm very sorry for what I've done to distress you; I had no idea you'd all feel so badly. I did n't mean any harm. I thought you'd like it."

The old man turned a little, bending his eyes on her, but without taking her hand as she had hoped. Usually when they met he kissed her. He did n't look angry now, he only looked very ill. A strange, inarticulate sound, a chorus of amazement and mirth, came from the others when she said she thought they'd like it; and indeed poor Francie was far from being able to measure the droll effect of that speech. "Like it—*like it?*" said Mr. Probert, staring at her as if a little afraid of her.

"What do you mean? She admits — she admits!" Mme. de Cliché exulted to her sister. "Did you arrange it all that day in the Bois — to punish me for having tried to separate you?" she pursued to the poor child, who stood gazing up piteously at the old man.

"I don't know what he has published — I have n't

seen it — I don't understand. I thought it was only to be a piece about me," she said to him.

"'About me'!" M. de Cliché repeated in English. "*Elle est divine!*" He turned away, raising his shoulders and hands and then letting them fall.

Mme. de Brécourt had picked up the newspaper; she rolled it together, saying to Francie that she must take it home, take it home immediately — then she'd see. She only seemed to wish to get her out of the room. But Mr. Probert had fixed their flushed little guest with his sick stare. "You gave information for that? You desired it?"

"Why *I* did n't desire it — but Mr. Flack did."

"Why do you know such ruffians? Where was your father?" the old man groaned.

"I thought he'd just be nice about my picture and give pleasure to Mr. Waterlow," Francie went on. "I thought he'd just speak about my being engaged and give a little account; so many people in America would be interested."

"So many people in America — that's just the dreadful thought, my dear," said Mme. de Brécourt kindly. "*Voyons*, put it in your muff and tell us what you think of it." And she continued to thrust forward the scandalous journal.

But Francie took no notice of it; she looked round from Mr. Probert at the others. "I told Gaston I'd certainly do something you would n't like."

"Well, he'll believe it now!" cried Mme. de Cliché.

"My poor child, do you think he'll like it any better?" asked Mme. de Brécourt.

Francie turned upon her beautiful dilated eyes in

which a world of new wonders and fears had suddenly got itself reflected. "He'll see it over there — he has seen it now."

"Oh my dear, you'll have news of him. Don't be afraid!" broke in high derision from Mme. de Cliché.

"Did *he* send you the paper?" her young friend went on to Mr. Probert.

"It was not directed in his hand," M. de Brécourt pronounced. "There was some stamp on the band — it came from the office."

"Mr. Flack — is that his hideous name? — must have seen to that," Mme. de Brécourt suggested.

"Or perhaps Florine," M. de Cliché interposed. "I should like to get hold of Florine!"

"I *did* — I did tell him so!" Francie repeated with all her fevered candour, alluding to her statement of a moment before and speaking as if she thought the circumstance detracted from the offence.

"So did I — so did we all!" said Mme. de Cliché.

"And will he suffer — as you suffer?" Francie continued, appealing to Mr. Probert.

"Suffer, suffer? He'll die!" cried the old man. "However, I won't answer for him; he'll tell you himself, when he returns."

"He'll die?" echoed Francie with the eyes of a child at the pantomime who has found the climax turning to demons or monsters or too much gunpowder.

"He'll never return — how can he show himself?" said Mme. de Cliché.

"That's not true — he'll come back to stand by me!" the girl flashed out.

"How could n't you feel us to be the last — the very last?" asked Mr. Probert with great gentleness. "How could n't you feel my poor son to be the last —?"

"*C'est un sens qui lui manque!*" shrilled implacably Mme. de Cliché.

"Let her go, papa — do let her go home," Mme. de Brécourt pleaded.

"Surely. That's the only place for her to-day," the elder sister continued.

"Yes, my child — you ought n't to be here. It's your father — he ought to understand," said Mr. Probert.

"For God's sake don't send for him — let it all stop!" And Mme. de Cliché made wild gestures.

Francie looked at her as she had never looked at any one in her life, and then said: "Good-bye, Mr. Probert — good-bye, Susan."

"Give her your arm — take her to the carriage," she heard Mme. de Brécourt growl to her husband. She got to the door she hardly knew how — she was only conscious that Susan held her once more long enough to kiss her. Poor Susan wanted to comfort her; that showed how bad — feeling as she did — she believed the whole business would yet be. It would be bad because Gaston, Gaston —! Francie did n't complete that thought, yet only Gaston was in her mind as she hurried to the carriage. M. de Brécourt hurried beside her; she would n't take his arm. But he opened the door for her and as she got in she heard him murmur in the strangest and most unexpected manner: "You're charming, mademoiselle — charming, charming!"

XII

Her absence had not been long and when she re-entered the familiar salon at the hotel she found her father and sister sitting there together as if they had timed her by their watches, a prey, both of them, to curiosity and suspense. Mr. Dosson however gave no sign of impatience; he only looked at her in silence through the smoke of his cigar — he profaned the red satin splendour with perpetual fumes — as she burst into the room. An irruption she made of her desired reappearance; she rushed to one of the tables, flinging down her muff and gloves, while Delia, who had sprung up as she came in, caught her closely and glared into her face with a "Francie Dosson, what *have* you been through?" Francie said nothing at first, only shutting her eyes and letting her sister do what she would with her. "She has been crying, poppa — she *has*," Delia almost shouted, pulling her down upon a sofa and fairly shaking her as she continued. "Will you please tell? I've been perfectly wild! Yes you have, you dreadful —!" the elder girl insisted, kissing her on the eyes. They opened at this compassionate pressure and Francie rested their troubled light on her father, who had now risen to his feet and stood with his back to the fire.

"Why, chicken," said Mr. Dosson, "you look as if you had had quite a worry."

"I told you I should — I told you, I told you!"

Francie broke out with a trembling voice. "And now it's come!"

"You don't mean to say you've *done* anything?" cried Delia, very white.

"It's all over, it's all over!" With which Francie's face braved denial.

"Are you crazy, Francie?" Delia demanded. "I'm sure you look as if you were."

"Ain't you going to be married, childie?" asked Mr. Dosson all considerately, but coming nearer to her.

Francie sprang up, releasing herself from her sister, and threw her arms round him. "Will you take me away, poppa? will you take me right straight away?"

"Of course I will, my precious. I'll take you anywhere. I don't want anything — it was n't *my* idea!" And Mr. Dosson and Delia looked at each other while the girl pressed her face upon his shoulder.

"I never heard such trash — you can't behave that way! Has he got engaged to some one else — in America?" Delia threw out.

"Why if it's over it's over. I guess it's all right," said Mr. Dosson, kissing his younger daughter. "I'll go back or I'll go on. I'll go anywhere you like."

"You won't have your daughters insulted, I presume!" Delia cried. "If you don't tell me this moment what has happened," she pursued to her sister, "I'll drive straight round there and make *them*."

"*Have* they insulted you, sweetie?" asked the old man, bending over his child, who simply leaned on him with her hidden face and no sound of tears.

Francie raised her head, turning round to their

companion. "Did I ever tell you anything else — did I ever believe in it for an hour?"

"Oh well, if you've done it on purpose to triumph over me we might as well go home, certainly. But I guess," Delia added, "you had better just wait till Gaston comes."

"It will be worse when he comes — if he thinks the same as they do."

"*Have* they insulted you — have they?" Mr. Dosson repeated while the smoke of his cigar, curling round the question, gave him the air of putting it with placidity.

"They think I've insulted *them* — they're in an awful state — they're almost dead. Mr. Flack has put it into the paper — everything, I don't know what — and they think it's too wicked. They were all there together — all at me at once, weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth. I never saw people so affected."

Delia's face grew big with her stare. "So affected?"

"Ah yes, I guess there's a good deal of *that*," said Mr. Dosson.

"It's too real — too terrible; you don't understand. It's all printed there — that they're immoral, and everything about them; everything that's private and dreadful," Francie explained.

"Immoral, is that so?" Mr. Dosson threw off.

"And about me too, and about Gaston and my marriage, and all sorts of personalities, and all the names, and Mme. de Villepreux, and everything. It's all printed there and they've read it. It says one of them steals."

"Will you be so good as to tell me what you 're talking about?" Delia enquired sternly. "Where is it printed and what have we got to do with it?"

"Some one sent it, and I told Mr. Flack."

"Do you mean *his* paper? Oh the horrid ape!" Delia cried with passion.

"Do they mind so what they see in the papers?" asked Mr. Dosson. "I guess they have n't seen what I've seen. Why there used to be things about *me* —"

"Well, it *is* about us too — about every one. They think it's the same as if I wrote it," Francie ruefully mentioned.

"Well, you know what you *could* do!" And Mr. Dosson beamed at her for common cheer.

"Do you mean that piece about your picture — that you told me about when you went with him again to see it?" Delia demanded.

"Oh I don't know what piece it is; I have n't seen it."

"Have n't seen it? Did n't they show it to you?"

"Yes, but I could n't read it. Mme. de Brécourt wanted me to take it — but I left it behind."

"Well, that's *like* you — like the Tauchnitzes littering up our track. I'll be bound I'd see it," Delia declared. "Has n't it come, does n't it always come?"

"I guess we have n't had the last — unless it's somewhere round," said Mr. Dosson.

"Poppa, go out and get it — you can buy it on the boulevard!" Delia continued. "Francie, what *did* you want to tell him?"

"I did n't know. I was just conversing. He seemed to take so much interest," Francie pleaded.

"Oh he's a deep one!" groaned Delia.

"Well, if folks are immoral you can't keep it out of the papers — and I don't know as you ought to want to," Mr. Dosson remarked. "If they *are* I'm glad to know it, lovey." And he gave his younger daughter a glance apparently intended to show that in this case he should know what to do.

But Francie was looking at her sister as if her attention had been arrested. "How do you mean — 'a deep one'?"

"Why he wanted to break it off, the fiend!"

Francie stared; then a deeper flush leapt to her face, already mottled as with the fine footprints of the Proberts, dancing for pain. "To break off my engagement?"

"Yes, just that. But I'll be hanged if he shall. Poppa, will you allow that?"

"Allow what?"

"Why Mr. Flack's vile interference. You won't let him do as he likes with us, I suppose, will you?"

"It's all done — it's all done!" said Francie. The tears had suddenly started into her eyes again.

"Well, he's so smart that it *is* likely he's too smart," her father allowed. "But what did they want you to do about it? — that's what *I* want to know?"

"They wanted me to say I knew nothing about it — but I could n't."

"But you did n't and you don't — if you have n't even read it!" Delia almost yelled.

"Where *is* the d—d thing?" their companion asked, looking helplessly about him.

"On the boulevard, at the very first of those kiosks you come to. That old woman has it — the one who speaks English — she always has it. Do go and get it — *do!*" And Delia pushed him, looked for his hat for him.

"I knew he wanted to print something and I can't say I did n't!" Francie said. "I thought he'd crack up my portrait and that Mr. Waterlow would like that, and Gaston and every one. And he talked to me about the paper — he's always doing that and always was — and I did n't see the harm. But even just knowing him — they think that's vile."

"Well, I should hope we can know whom we like!" — and Delia bounced fairly round as from the force of her high spirit.

Mr. Dosson had put on his hat — he was going out for the paper. "Why he kept us alive last year," he uttered in tribute.

"Well, he seems to have killed us now," Delia cried.

"Well, don't give up an old friend," her father urged with his hand on the door. "And don't back down on anything you've done."

"Lord, what a fuss about an old newspaper!" Delia went on in her exasperation. "It must be about two weeks old anyway. Did n't they ever see a society-paper before?"

"They can't have seen much," said Mr. Dosson. He paused still with his hand on the door. "Don't you worry — Gaston will make it all right."

"Gaston? — it will kill Gaston!"

"Is that what they say?" Delia demanded.

"Gaston will never look at me again."

"Well then he'll have to look at *me*," said Mr. Dosson.

"Do you mean that he'll give you up — he'll be so *crawling?*" Delia went on.

"They say he's just the one who'll feel it most. But I'm the one who does that," said Francie with a strange smile.

"They're stuffing you with lies — because *they* don't like it. He'll be tender and true," Delia glared.

"When *they* hate me? — Never!" And Francie shook her head slowly, still with her smile of softness. "That's what he cared for most — to make them like me."

"And is n't he a gentleman, I should like to know?" asked Delia.

"Yes, and that's why I won't marry him — if I've injured him."

"Shucks! he has seen the papers over there. You wait till he comes," Mr. Dosson enjoined, passing out of the room.

The girls remained there together and after a moment Delia resumed. "Well, he has got to fix it — that's one thing I can tell you."

"Who has got to fix it?"

"Why that villainous man. He has got to publish another piece saying it's all false or all a mistake."

"Yes, you'd better make him," said Francie with a weak laugh. "You'd better go after him — down to Nice."

"You don't mean to say he's gone down to Nice?"

"Did n't he say he was going there as soon as he came back from London — going right through without stopping?"

"I don't know but he did," said Delia. Then she added: "The mean coward!"

"Why do you say that? He can't hide at Nice — they can find him there."

"Are they going after him?"

"They want to shoot him — to stab him, I don't know what — those men."

"Well, I wish they would," said Delia.

"They'd better shoot me. I shall defend him. I shall protect him," Francie went on.

"How can you protect him? You shall never speak to him again!" her sister engaged.

Francie had a pause. "I can protect him without speaking to him. I can tell the simple truth — that he did n't print a word but what I told him."

"I'd like to see him not!" Delia fairly hooted. "When did he grow so particular? He fixed it up," she said with assurance. "They always do in the papers — they'd be ashamed if they did n't. Well now he has got to bring out a piece praising them up — praising them to the skies: that's what he has got to do!" she wound up with decision.

"Praising them up? They'll hate that worse," Francie returned musingly.

Delia stared. "What on earth then do they want?"

Francie had sunk to the sofa; her eyes were fixed on the carpet. She gave no reply to this question but presently said: "We had better go to-morrow, the first hour that's possible."

"Go where? Do you mean to Nice?"

"I don't care where. Anywhere to get away."

"Before Gaston comes — without seeing him?"

"I don't want to see him. When they were all ranting and raving at me just now I wished he was there — I told them so. But now I don't feel like that — I can never see him again."

"I don't suppose *you're* crazy, are you?" Delia returned.

"I can't tell him it was n't me — I can't, I can't!" her companion went on.

Delia planted herself in front of her. "Francie Dosson, if you're going to tell him you've done anything wrong you might as well stop before you begin. Did n't you hear how poppa put it?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Francie said listlessly.

"'Don't give up an old friend — there's nothing on earth so mean.' Now is n't Gaston Probert an old friend?"

"It will be very simple — he'll give me up."

"Then he'll be worse than a worm."

"Not in the least — he'll give me up as he took me. He'd never have asked me to marry him if he had n't been able to get *them* to accept me: he thinks everything in life of *them*. If they cast me off now he'll do just the same. He'll have to choose between us, and when it comes to that he'll never choose me."

"He'll never choose Mr. Flack, if that's what you mean — if you're going to identify yourself so with *him!*"

"Oh I wish he'd never been born!" Francie wailed; after which she suddenly shivered. And then

she added that she was sick — she was going to bed, and her sister took her off to her room.

Mr. Dosson that afternoon, sitting by his younger daughter's bedside, read the dreadful "piece" out to both his children from the copy of the *Reverberator* he had secured on the boulevard. It is a remarkable fact that as a family they were rather disappointed in this composition, in which their curiosity found less to repay it than it had expected, their resentment against Mr. Flack less to stimulate it, their fluttering effort to take the point of view of the Proberts less to sustain it, and their acceptance of the promulgation of Francie's innocent remarks as a natural incident of the life of the day less to make them reconsider it. The letter from Paris appeared lively, "chatty," highly calculated to please, and so far as the personalities contained in it were concerned Mr. Dosson wanted to know if they were n't aware over here of the charges brought every day against the most prominent men in Boston. "If there was anything in that style they might talk," he said; and he scanned the effusion afresh with a certain surprise at not finding in it some imputation of pecuniary malversation. The effect of an acquaintance with the text was to depress Delia, who did n't exactly see what there was in it to take back or explain away. However, she was aware there were some points they did n't understand, and doubtless these were the scandalous places — the things that had so worked up the Proberts. But why should they have minded if other people did n't understand the allusions (these were peculiar, but peculiarly incomprehensible) any better

than she did? The whole thing struck Francie herself as infinitely less lurid than Mme. de Brécourt's account of it, and the part about her own situation and her beautiful picture seemed to make even less of the subject than it easily might have done. It was scanty, it was "skimpy," and if Mr. Waterlow was offended it would n't be because they had published too much about him. It was nevertheless clear to her that there were a lot of things *she* had n't told Mr. Flack, as well as a great many she had: perhaps those were the things that lady had put in — Florine or Dorine — the one she had mentioned at Mme. de Brécourt's.

All the same, if the communication in the *Reverberator* let them down, at the hotel, more gently than had seemed likely and bristled so much less than was to have been feared with explanations of the anguish of the Proberts, this did n't diminish the girl's sense of responsibility nor make the case a whit less grave. It only showed how sensitive and fastidious the Proberts were and therefore with what difficulty they would come round to condonation. Moreover Francie made another reflexion as she lay there — for Delia kept her in bed nearly three days, feeling this to be for the moment at any rate an effectual reply to any absurd heroics about leaving Paris. Perhaps they had got "case-hardened" Francie said to herself; perhaps they had read so many such bad things that they had lost the delicacy of their palate, as people were said to do who lived on food too violently spiced. Then, very weak and vague and passive as she was now, in the bedimmed room, in the soft Parisian bed and with

Delia treating her as much as possible like a sick person, she thought of the lively and chatty letters they had always seen in the papers and wondered if they *all* meant a violation of sanctities, a convulsion of homes, a burning of smitten faces, a rupture of girls' engagements. It was present to her as an agreeable negative, I must add, that her father and sister took no strenuous view of her responsibility or of their own: they neither brought the matter home to her as a crime nor made her worse through her feeling them anxiously understate their blame. There was a pleasant cheerful helplessness in her father on this head as on every other. There could be no more discussion among them on such a question than there had ever been, for none was needed to show that for these candid minds the newspapers and all they contained were a part of the general fatality of things, of the recurrent freshness of the universe, coming out like the sun in the morning or the stars at night or the wind and the weather at all times.

The thing that worried Francie most while Delia kept her in bed was the apprehension of what her father might do; but this was not a fear of what he might do to Mr. Flack. He would go round perhaps to Mr. Probert's or to Mme. de Brécourt's and reprimand them for having made things so rough to his "chicken." It was true she had scarcely ever seen him reprimand any one for anything; but on the other hand nothing like this had ever happened before to her or to Delia. They had made each other cry once or twice, but no one else had ever made them, and no one had ever broken out on them that way and fright-

ened them half to death. Francie wanted her father not to go round; she had a sense that those other people had somehow stores of comparison, of propriety, of superiority, in any discussion, which he could n't command. She wanted nothing done and no communication to pass — only a proud unbickering silence on the part of the Dossons. If the Proberts made a noise and they made none it would be they who would have the best appearance. Moreover now, with each elapsing day, she felt she did wish to see Gaston about it. Her desire was to wait, counting the hours, so that she might just clearly explain, saying two or three things. Perhaps these things would n't make it better — very likely they would n't; but at any rate nothing would have been done in the interval, at least on her part and her father's and Delia's, to make it worse. She told her father that she would n't, as Delia put it, "want to have him" go round, and was in some degree relieved at perceiving that he did n't seem very clear as to what it was open to him to say to their alienated friends. He was n't afraid but was uncertain. His relation to almost everything that had happened to them as a family from a good while back was a sense of the absence of precedents, and precedents were particularly absent now, for he had never before seen a lot of people in a rage about a piece in the paper.

Delia also reassured her; she said she'd see to it that poppa did n't sneak round. She communicated to her indeed that he had n't the smallest doubt that Gaston, in a few days, would blow them up — all *them* down there — much higher than they had blown

her, and that he was very sorry he had let her go down herself on that sort of summons. It was for her and the rest to come to Francie and to him, and if they had anything practical to say they'd arrive in a body yet. If Mr. Dosson had the sense of his daughter's having been roughly handled he derived some of the consolation of amusement from his persistent humorous view of the Proberts as a "body." If they were consistent with their character or with their complaint they would move *en masse* upon the hotel, and he hung about at home a good deal as if to wait for them. Delia intimated to her sister that this vision cheered them up as they sat, they two, in the red salon while Francie was in bed. Of course it did n't exhilarate this young lady, and she even looked for no brighter side now. She knew almost nothing but her sharp little ache of suspense, her presentiment of Gaston's horror, which grew all the while. Delia remarked to her once that he would have seen lots of society-papers over there, he would have become familiar; but this only suggested to the girl — she had at present strange new moments and impulses of quick reasoning — that they would only prepare him to be disgusted, not to be indifferent. His disgust would be colder than anything she had ever known and would complete her knowledge of him — make her understand him properly for the first time. She would just meet it as briefly as possible; it would wind up the business, close the incident, and all would be over.

He did n't write; that proved it in advance; there had now been two or three mails without a letter. He had seen the paper in Boston or in New York and it

had simply struck him dumb. It was very well for Delia to say that of course he did n't write when he was on the ocean: how could they get his letters even if he did? There had been time before — before he sailed; though Delia represented that people never wrote then. They were ever so much too busy at the last and were going to see their correspondents in a few days anyway. The only missives that came to Francie were a copy of the *Reverberator*, addressed in Mr. Flack's hand and with a great inkmark on the margin of the fatal letter, and three intense pages from Mme. de Brécourt, received forty-eight hours after the scene at her house. This lady expressed herself as follows:

My Dear Francie — I felt very badly after you had gone yesterday morning, and I had twenty minds to go and see you. But we 've talked it over conscientiously and it appears to us that we 've no right to take any such step till Gaston arrives. The situation is n't exclusively ours but belongs to him as well, and we feel we ought to make it over to him in as simple and compact a form as possible. Therefore, as we regard it, we had better not touch it (it 's so delicate, is n't it, my poor child?) but leave it just as it is. They think I even exceed my powers in writing you these simple lines, and that once your participation has been *constatée* (which was the only advantage of that dreadful scene) *everything* should stop. But I 've liked you, Francie, I 've believed in you, and I don't wish you to be able to say that in spite of the thunderbolt you 've drawn down on us I 've not treated you with tender-

ness. It's a thunderbolt indeed, my poor and innocent but disastrous little friend! We're hearing more of it already — the horrible Republican papers here have (*as we know*) already got hold of the unspeakable sheet and are preparing to reproduce the article: that is such parts of it as they may put forward (with innuendoes and *sous-entendus* to eke out the rest) without exposing themselves to a suit for defamation. Poor Léonie de Villepreux has been with us constantly and Jeanne and her husband have telegraphed that we may expect them day after to-morrow. They are evidently immensely *émotionnés*, for they almost never telegraph. They wish so to receive Gaston. We have determined all the same to be intensely *quiet*, and that will be sure to be his view. Alphonse and Maxime now recognise that it's best to leave Mr. Flack alone, hard as it is to keep one's hands off him. Have you anything to *lui faire dire* — to my precious brother when he arrives? But it's foolish of me to ask you that, for you had much better not answer this. You will no doubt have an opportunity to say to him — whatever, my dear Francie, you *can* say! It will matter comparatively little that you may never be able to say it to your friend with every allowance

SUZANNE DE BRÉCOURT.

Francie looked at this letter and tossed it away without reading it. Delia picked it up, read it to her father, who did n't understand it, and kept it in her possession, poring over it as Mr. Flack had seen her pore over the cards that were left while she was out or over the registers of American travellers. They knew of

Gaston's arrival by his telegraphing from Havre (he came back by the French line) and he mentioned the hour — "about dinner-time" — at which he should reach Paris. Delia, after dinner, made her father take her to the circus so that Francie should be left alone to receive her intended, who would be sure to hurry round in the course of the evening. The girl herself expressed no preference whatever on this point, and the idea was one of Delia's masterly ones, her flashes of inspiration. There was never any difficulty about imposing such conceptions on poppa. But at half-past ten, when they returned, the young man had not appeared, and Francie remained only long enough to say "I told you so!" with a white face and march off to her room with her candle. She locked herself in and her sister could n't get at her that night. It was another of Delia's inspirations not to try, after she had felt that the door was fast. She forbore, in the exercise of a great discretion, but she herself for the ensuing hours slept no wink. Nevertheless the next morning, as early as ten o'clock, she had the energy to drag her father out to the banker's and to keep him out two hours. It would be inconceivable now that Gaston should n't turn up before *déjeuner*. He did turn up; about eleven o'clock he came in and found Francie alone. She noticed, for strangeness, that he was very pale at the same time that he was sunburnt; also that he did n't for an instant smile at her. It was very certain there was no bright flicker in her own face, and they had the most singular, the most unnatural meeting. He only said as he arrived: "I could n't come last evening; they

made it impossible; they were all there and we were up till three o'clock this morning." He looked as if he had been through terrible things, and it was n't simply the strain of his attention to so much business in America. What passed next she could n't remember afterwards; it seemed but a few seconds before he said to her slowly, holding her hand — before this he had pressed his lips to hers silently — "Is it true, Francie, what they say (and they swear to it!) that *you* told that blackguard those horrors; that that infamous letter 's only a report of *your* talk ?"

"I told him everything — it's all me, *me*, ME!" the girl replied exaltedly, without pretending to hesitate an instant as to what he might mean.

Gaston looked at her with deep eyes, then walked straight away to the window and remained there in silence. She herself said nothing more. At last the young man went on: "And I who insisted to them that there was no natural delicacy like yours!"

"Well, you'll never need to insist about anything any more!" she cried. And with this she dashed out of the room by the nearest door. When Delia and Mr. Dosson returned the red salon was empty and Francie was again locked in her room. But this time her sister forced an entrance.

XIII

Mr. Dosson, as we know, was, almost more than anything else, loosely contemplative, and the present occasion could only minister to that side of his nature, especially as, so far at least as his observation of his daughters went, it had not urged him into uncontrollable movement. But the truth is that the intensity, or rather the continuity, of his meditations did engender an act not perceived by these young ladies, though its consequences presently became definite enough. While he waited for the Proberts to arrive in a phalanx and noted that they failed to do so he had plenty of time to ask himself — and also to ask Delia — questions about Mr. Flack. So far as they were addressed to his daughter they were promptly answered, for Delia had been ready from the first, as we have seen, to pronounce upon the conduct of the young journalist. Her view of it was clearer every hour; there was a difference however in the course of action which she judged this view to demand. At first he was to have been blown up sky-high for the mess he had got them into — profitless as the process might be and vain the satisfaction; he was to have been scourged with the sharpest lashes the sense of violated confidence could inflict. At present he was not to be touched with a ten-foot pole, but rather cut dead, cast off and ignored, let alone to his dying day: Delia quickly caught at this for the right grand way of showing displeasure. Such

was the manner in which she characterised it in her frequent conversations with her father, if that can be called conversation which consisted of his serenely smoking while she poured forth arguments that kept repetition abreast of variety. The same cause will according to application produce effects without sameness: as a mark of which truth the catastrophe that made Delia express freely the hope she might never again see so much as the end of Mr. Flack's nose had just the opposite action on her parent. The best balm for his mystification would have been to let his eyes sociably travel over his young friend's whole person; this would have been to deal again with quantities and forces he could measure and in terms he could understand. If indeed the difference had been pushed further the girl would have kept the field, for she had the advantage of being able to motive her attitude, to which Mr. Dosson could have opposed but an indefensible, in fact an inarticulate, laxity. She had touched on her deepest conviction in saying to Francie that the correspondent of the *Reverberator* had played them that trick on purpose to get them into such trouble with the Proberts that he might see his own hopes bloom again in the heat of their disaster. This had many of the appearances of a strained interpretation, but that did n't prevent Delia from placing it before her father several times an hour. It mattered little that he should remark in return that he did n't see what good it could do Mr. Flack that Francie — and he and Delia, for all he could guess — should be disgusted with him: to Mr. Dosson's mind that was such a queer way of reasoning. Delia maintained that she

understood perfectly, though she could n't explain — and at any rate she did n't want the manœuvring creature to come flying back from Nice. She did n't want him to know there had been a scandal, that they had a grievance against him, that any one had so much as heard of his article or cared what he published or did n't publish; above all she did n't want him to know that the Proberts had cooled off. She did n't want him to dream he could have had such effects. Mixed up with this high rigour on Miss Dosson's part was the oddest secret complacency of reflexion that in consequence of what Mr. Flack *had* published the great American community was in a position to know with what fine folks Francie and she were associated. She hoped that some of the people who used only to call when they were "off to-morrow" would take the lesson to heart.

While she glowed with this consolation as well as with the resentment for which it was required her father quietly addressed a few words by letter to their young friend in the south. This communication was not of a minatory order; it expressed on the contrary the loose sociability which was the essence of the good gentleman's nature. He wanted to see Mr. Flack, to talk the whole thing over, and the desire to hold him to an account would play but a small part in the interview. It commended itself much more to him that the touchiness of the Proberts should be a sign of a family of cranks — so little did any experience of his own match it — than that a newspaper-man had misbehaved in trying to turn out an attractive piece. As the newspaper-man happened to be the person with

whom he had most consorted for some time back he felt drawn to him in presence of a new problem, and somehow it did n't seem to Mr. Dosson to disqualify him as a source of comfort that it was just he who had been the fountain of injury. The injury would n't be there if the Proberts did n't point to it with a thousand fingers. Moreover Mr. Dosson could n't turn his back at such short notice on a man who had smoked so many of his cigars, ordered so many of his dinners and helped him so handsomely to spend his money: such acts constituted a bond, and when there was a bond people gave it a little jerk in time of trouble. His letter to Nice was the little jerk.

The morning after Francie had passed with such an air from Gaston's sight and left him planted in the salon — he had remained ten minutes, to see if she would reappear, and then had marched out of the hotel — she received by the first post a letter from him, written the evening before. It conveyed his deep regret that their meeting that day should have been of so painful, so unnatural a character, and the hope that she did n't consider, as her strange behaviour had seemed to suggest, that *she* had anything to complain of. There was too much he wanted to say, and above all too much he wanted to ask, for him to consent to the indefinite postponement of a necessary interview. There were explanations, assurances, *de part et d'autre*, with which it was manifestly impossible that either of them should dispense. He would therefore propose that she should see him again, and not be wanting in patience to that end, late on the morrow. He did n't propose an earlier moment because his hands were

terribly full at home. Frankly speaking, the state of things there was of the worst. Jane and her husband had just arrived and had made him a violent, an unexpected scene. Two of the French newspapers had got hold of the article and had given the most perfidious extracts. His father had n't stirred out of the house, had n't put his foot inside a club, for more than a week. Marguerite and Maxime were immediately to start for England on an indefinite absence. They could n't face their life in Paris. For himself he was in the breach, fighting hard and making, on her behalf, asseverations it was impossible for him to believe, in spite of the dreadful defiant confession she had appeared to throw at him in the morning, that she would n't virtually confirm. He would come in as soon after nine as possible; the day up to that time would be stiff in the Cours la Reine, and he begged her in the meantime not to doubt of his perfect tenderness. So far from her having caused it at all to shrink, he had never yet felt her to have, in his affection, such a treasure of indulgence to draw upon.

A couple of hours after the receipt of this manifesto Francie lay on one of the satin sofas with her eyes closed and her hand clinched upon it in her pocket. Delia sat hard by with a needle in her fingers, certain morsels of silk and ribbon in her lap, several pins in her mouth, and her attention turning constantly from her work to her sister's face. The weather was now so completely vernal that Mr. Dosson was able to haunt the court, and he had lately resumed this practice, in which he was presumably at the present moment absorbed. Delia had lowered her needle and

was making sure if her companion were awake — she had been perfectly still for so long — when her glance was drawn to the door, which she heard pushed open. Mr. Flack stood there, looking from one to the other of the young ladies as to see which would be most agreeably surprised by his visit.

"I saw your father downstairs — he says it's all right," said the journalist, advancing with a brave grin. "He told me to come straight up — I had quite a talk with him."

"All right — *all right?*" Delia Dosson repeated, springing up. "Yes indeed — I should say so!" Then she checked herself, asking in another manner: "Is that so? poppa sent you up?" And then in still another: "Well, have you had a good time at Nice?"

"You'd better all come right down and see. It's lovely down there. If you'll come down I'll go right back. I guess you want a change," Mr. Flack went on. He spoke to Delia but he looked at Francie, who showed she had not been asleep by the quick consciousness with which she raised herself on her sofa. She gazed at the visitor with parted lips, but uttered no word. He barely faltered, coming toward her with his conscious grimace and his hand out. His knowing eyes were more knowing than ever, but had an odd appearance of being smaller, like penetrating points. "Your father has told me all about it. Did you ever hear of anything so cheap?"

"All about what? — all about what?" said Delia, whose attempt to represent happy ignorance was menaced by an intromission of ferocity. She might succeed in appearing ignorant, but could scarcely

succeed in appearing kind. Francie had risen to her feet and had suffered Mr. Flack to possess himself for a moment of her hand, but neither of them had asked the young man to sit down. "I thought you were going to stay a month at Nice?" Delia continued.

"Well, I was, but your father's letter started me up."

"Father's letter?"

"He wrote me about the row — did n't you know it? Then I broke. You did n't suppose I was going to stay down there when there were such times up here."

"Gracious!" Delia panted.

"Is it pleasant at Nice? Is it very gay? Is n't it very hot now?" Francie rather limply asked.

"Oh it's all right. But I have n't come up here to crow about Nice, have I?"

"Why not, if we want you to?" — Delia spoke up.

Mr. Flack looked at her for a moment very hard, in the whites of the eyes; then he replied, turning back to her sister: "Anything *you* like, Miss Francie. With you one subject's as good as another. Can't we sit down? Can't we be comfortable?" he added.

"Comfortable? of course we can!" cried Delia, but she remained erect while Francie sank upon the sofa again and their companion took possession of the nearest chair.

"Do you remember what I told you once, that the people *will* have the plums?" George Flack asked with a hard buoyancy of the younger girl.

She looked an instant as if she were trying to recollect what he had told her; and then said, more remotely, "*Did* father write to you?"

"Of course he did. That's why I'm here."

"Poor father, sometimes he does n't know *what* to do!" Delia threw in with violence.

"He told me the *Reverberator* has raised a breeze. I guessed that for myself when I saw the way the papers here were after it. That thing will go the rounds, you'll see. What brought me was learning from him that they *have* got their backs up."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Delia Dosson rang out.

Mr. Flack turned his eyes on her own as he had done a moment before; Francie sat there serious, looking hard at the carpet. "What game are you trying, Miss Delia? It ain't true *you* care what I wrote, is it?" he pursued, addressing himself again to Francie.

After a moment she raised her eyes. "Did you write it yourself?"

"What do you care what he wrote — or what does any one care?" Delia again interposed.

"It has done the paper more good than anything — every one's so interested," said Mr. Flack in the tone of reasonable explanation. "And you don't feel you've anything to complain of, do you?" he added to Francie kindly.

"Do you mean because I told you?"

"Why certainly. Did n't it all spring out of that lovely drive and that walk up in the Bois we had — when you took me up to see your portrait? Did n't you understand that I wanted you to know that the public would appreciate a column or two about Mr. Waterlow's new picture, and about you as the subject

of it, and about your being engaged to a member of the grand old *monde*, and about what was going on in the grand old *monde*, which would naturally attract attention through that? Why Miss Francie," Mr. Flack ever so blandly pursued, "you regularly *talked* as if you did."

"Did I talk a great deal?" asked Francie.

"Why most freely — it was too lovely. We had a real grand old jaw. Don't you remember when we sat there in the Bois?"

"Oh rubbish!" Delia panted.

"Yes, and Mme. de Cliché passed."

"And you told me she was scandalised. And we had to laugh," he reminded her — "it struck us as so idiotic. I said it was a high old *pose*, and I knew what to think of it. Your father tells me she's scandalised now — she and all the rest of them — at the sight of their names at last in a *real* newspaper. Well now, if you want to know, it's a bigger pose than ever, and, as I said just now, it's too damned cheap. It's *thin* — that's what it is; and if it were genuine it would n't count. They pretend to be shocked because it looks exclusive, but in point of fact they like it first-rate."

"Are you talking about that old piece in the paper? Mercy, was n't that dead and buried days and days ago?" Delia quavered afresh. She hovered there in dismay as well as in displeasure, upset by the news that her father had summoned Mr. Flack to Paris, which struck her almost as a treachery, since it seemed to denote a plan. A plan, and an uncommunicated plan, on Mr. Dosson's part was unnatural and alarm-

ing; and there was further provocation in his appearing to shirk the responsibility of it by not having come up at such a moment with his accomplice. Delia was impatient to know what he wanted anyway. Did he want to drag them down again to such commonness — ah she felt the commonness now! — even though it *could* hustle? Did he want to put Mr. Flack forward, with a feeble flourish that did n't answer one of their questions, as a substitute for the alienated Gaston? If she had n't been afraid that something still more uncanny than anything that had happened yet might come to pass between her two companions in case of her leaving them together she would have darted down to the court to appease her conjectures, to challenge her father and tell him how particularly pleased she should be if he would n't put in his oar. She felt liberated, however, the next moment, for something occurred that struck her as a sure proof of the state of her sister's spirit.

"Do you know the view I take of the matter, according to what your father has told me?" Mr. Flack enquired. "I don't mean it was he gave me the tip; I guess I've seen enough over here by this time to have worked it out. They're scandalised all right — they're blue with horror and have never heard of anything so dreadful. Miss Francie," her visitor roared, "that ain't good enough for you and me. They know what's in the papers every day of their lives and they know how it got there. They ain't like the fellow in the story — who was he? — who could n't think how the apples got into the dumplings. They're just grabbing a pretext to break because

— because, well, they don't think you're blue blood. They're delighted to strike a pretext they can work, and they're all cackling over the egg it has taken so many hens of 'em to lay. That's *my* diagnosis if you want to know."

"Oh — how can you say such a thing?" Francie returned with a tremor in her voice that struck her sister. Her eyes met Delia's at the same moment, and this young woman's heart bounded with the sense that she was safe. Mr. Flack's power to hustle presumed too far — though Mr. Dosson had crude notions about the licence of the press she felt, even as an untutored woman, what a false step he was now taking — and it seemed to her that Francie, who was not impressed (the particular light in her eyes now showed it) could be trusted to allow him no benefit.

"What does it matter what he says, my dear?" she interposed. "Do make him drop the subject — he's talking very wild. I'm going down to see what poppa means — I never heard of anything so flat!" At the door she paused a moment to add mutely, by mere facial force: "Now just wipe him out, mind!" It was the same injunction she had launched at her from afar that day, a year before, when they all dined at Saint-Germain, and she could remember how effective it had then been. The next moment she flirted out.

As soon as she had gone Mr. Flack moved nearer to Francie. "Now look here, you're not going back on me, are you?"

"Going back on you — what do you mean?"

"Ain't we together in this thing? Why sure! We're *close* together, Miss Francie!"

"Together — together?" Francie repeated with charming wan but not at all tender eyes on him.

"Don't you remember what I said to you — just as straight as my course always is — before we went up there, before our lovely drive? I stated to you that I felt — that I always feel — my great hearty hungry public behind me."

"Oh yes, I understood — it was all for you to work it up. I told them so. I never denied it," Francie brought forth.

"You told them so?"

"When they were all crying and going on. I told them I knew it — I told them I gave you the tip as you call it."

She felt Mr. Flack fix her all alarmingly as she spoke these words; then he was still nearer to her — he had taken her hand. "Ah you're too sweet!" She disengaged her hand and in the effort she sprang up; but he, rising too, seemed to press always nearer — she had a sense (it was disagreeable) that he was demonstrative — so that she retreated a little before him. "They were all there roaring and raging, trying to make you believe you had outraged them?"

"All but young Mr. Probert. Certainly they don't like it," she said at her distance.

"The cowards!" George Flack after a moment remarked. "And where was young Mr. Probert?" he then demanded.

"He was away — I've told you — in America."

"Ah yes, your father told me. But now he's back does n't he like it either?"

"I don't know, Mr. Flack," Francie answered with impatience.

"Well I do then. He's a coward too — he'll do what his poppa tells him, and the countess and the duchess and his French brothers-in-law from whom he takes lessons: he'll just back down, he'll give you up."

"I can't talk with you about that," said Francie.

"Why not? why is he such a sacred subject, when we *are* together? You can't alter that," her visitor insisted. "It was too lovely your standing up for me — your not denying me!"

"You put in things I never said. It seems to me it was very different," she freely contended.

"Everything *is* different when it's printed. What else would be the good of the papers? Besides, it was n't I; it was a lady who helps me here — you've heard me speak of her: Miss Topping. She wants so much to know you — she wants to talk with you."

"And will she publish *that?*" Francie asked with unstudied effect.

Mr. Flack stared a moment. "Lord, how they've worked on you! And do *you* think it's bad?"

"Do I think what's bad?"

"Why the letter we're talking about."

"Well — I did n't see the point of so much."

He waited a little, interestedly. "Do you think I took any advantage?"

She made no answer at first, but after a moment said in a tone he had never heard from her: "Why do

you come here this way? Why do you ask me such questions?"

He hesitated; after which he broke out: "Because I love you. Don't you know that?"

"Oh *please* don't!" she almost moaned, turning away.

But he was launched now and he let himself go. "Why won't you understand it — why won't you understand the rest? Don't you see how it has worked round — the heartless brutes they've turned into, and the way *our* life, yours and mine, is bound to be the same? Don't you see the damned sneaking scorn with which they treat you and that *I* only want to do anything in the world for you?"

Francie's white face, very quiet now, let all this pass without a sign of satisfaction. Her only response was presently to say: "Why did you ask me so many questions that day?"

"Because I always ask questions — it's my nature and my business to ask them. Have n't you always seen me ask you and ask every one all I could? Don't you know they're the very foundation of my work? I thought you sympathised with my work so much — you used to tell me you did."

"Well, I did," she allowed.

"You put it in the dead past, I see. You don't then any more?"

If this remark was on her visitor's part the sign of a rare assurance the girl's cold mildness was still unruffled by it. She considered, she even smiled; then she replied: "Oh yes I do — only not so much."

"They *have* worked on you; but I should have

thought they'd have disgusted you. I don't care — even a little sympathy will do: whatever you've got left." He paused, looking at her, but it was a speech she had nothing for; so he went on: "There was no obligation for you to answer my questions — you might have shut me up that day with a word."

"Really?" she asked with all her grave good faith in her face. "I thought I *had* to — for fear I should appear ungrateful."

"Ungrateful?"

"Why to you — after what you had done. Don't you remember that it was you who introduced us —?" And she paused with a fatigued delicacy.

"Not to those snobs who are screaming like frightened peacocks. I beg your pardon — I have n't *that* on my conscience!" Mr. Flack quite grandly declared.

"Well, you introduced us to Mr. Waterlow and he introduced us to — to his friends," she explained, colouring, as if it were a fault, for the inexactness caused by her magnanimity. "That's why I thought I ought to tell you what you'd like."

"Why, do you suppose if I'd known where that first visit of ours to Waterlow was going to bring you out I'd have taken you within fifty miles —?" He stopped suddenly; then in another tone: "*Je*rusalem, there's no one like you! And you told them it was all *you?*"

"Never mind what I told them."

"Miss Francie," said George Flack, "if you'll marry me I'll never ask a question again. I'll go into some other business."

"Then you did n't do it on purpose?" Francie asked.

"On purpose?"

"To get me into a quarrel with them — so that I might be free again."

"Well, of all the blamed ideas —!" the young man gasped. "*Your* pure mind never gave birth to that — it was your sister's."

"Was n't it natural it should occur to me, since if, as you say, you'd never consciously have been the means —"

"Ah but I *was* the means!" Mr. Flack interrupted. "We must go, after all, by what *did* happen."

"Well, I thanked you when I drove with you and let you draw me out. So we're square, are n't we?" The term Francie used was a colloquialism generally associated with levity, but her face, as she spoke, was none the less deeply serious — serious even to pain.

"We're square?" he repeated.

"I don't think you ought to ask for anything more. Good-bye."

"Good-bye? Never!" cried George Flack, who flushed with his defeat to a degree that spoke strangely of his hopes.

Something in the way she repeated her "Good-bye!" betrayed her impression of this, and not a little withal that so much confidence left her unflattered. "Do go away!" she broke out.

"Well, I'll come back very soon" — and he took up his hat.

"Please don't — I don't like it." She had now contrived to put a wide space between them.

"Oh you tormentress!" he groaned. He went toward the door, but before he reached it turned round.

"Will you tell me this anyway? *Are* you going to marry the lot — after this?"

"Do you want to put that in the paper?"

"Of course I do — and say you said it!" Mr. Flack held up his head.

They stood looking at each other across the large room. "Well then — I ain't. There!"

"That's all right," he said as he went out.

XIV

When Gaston Probert came in that evening he was received by Mr. Dosson and Delia, and when he asked where Francie might be was told by the latter that she would show herself in half an hour. Francie had instructed her sister that as their friend would have, first of all, information to give their father about the business he had transacted in America he would n't care for a lot of women in the room. When Delia reported this speech to Mr. Dosson that gentleman protested that he was n't in any hurry for the business; what he wanted to find out most was whether Mr. Probert had a good time — whether he had liked it over there. Gaston might have liked it, but he did n't look as if he had had a very good time. His face told of reverses, of suffering; and Delia declared to him that if she had n't received his assurance to the contrary she would have believed he was right down sick. He allowed that he had been very sick at sea and was still feeling the effect of it, but insisted that there was nothing the matter with him now. He sat for some time with Mr. Dosson and Delia, and never once alluded to the cloud that hung over their relations. The girl had schooled her father to a waiting attitude on this point, and the manner in which she had descended on him in the morning, after Mr. Flack had come upstairs, was a lesson he was n't likely soon to forget. It had been impressed on him that she was indeed wiser than he

could pretend to be, and he was now mindful that he must n't speak of the "piece in the paper" unless young Probert should speak of it first. When Delia rushed down to him in the court she began by asking him categorically whom he had wished to do good to by sending Mr. Flack up to their parlour. To Francie or to her? Why the way they felt then, they detested his very name. To Mr. Flack himself? Why he had simply exposed him to the biggest snub he had ever got in his life.

"Well, hanged if I understand!" poor Mr. Dosson had said. "I thought you liked the piece — you think it's so queer *they* don't like it." "They," in the parlance of the Dossons, now never meant anything but the Proberts in congress assembled.

"I don't think anything's queer but you!" Delia had retorted; and she had let her father know that she had left Francie in the very act of "handling" Mr. Flack.

"Is that so?" the old gentleman had quavered in an impotence that made him wince with a sense of meanness — meanness to his bold initiator of so many Parisian hours.

Francie's visitor came down a few minutes later and passed through the court and out of the hotel without looking at them. Mr. Dosson had been going to call after him, but Delia checked him with a violent pinch. The unsociable manner of the young journalist's departure deepened Mr. Dosson's dull ache over the mystery of things. I think this may be said to have been the only incident in the whole business that gave him a personal pang. He remembered how many

of his cigars he had smoked with Mr. Flack and how universal a participant he had made him. This haughtiness struck him as the failure of friendship — not the publication of details about the Proberts. Interwoven with Mr. Dosson's nature was the view that if these people had done bad things they ought to be ashamed of themselves and he could n't pity them, and that if they had n't done them there was no need of making such a rumpus about other people's knowing. It was therefore, in spite of the young man's rough exit, still in the tone of American condonation that he had observed to Delia: "He says that's what they like over there and that it stands to reason that if you start a paper you've got to give them what they like. If you want the people with you, you've got to be with the people."

"Well, there are a good many people in the world. I don't think the Proberts are with us much."

"Oh he does n't mean them," said Mr. Dosson.

"Well, I do!" cried Delia.

At one of the ormolu tables, near a lamp with a pink shade, Gaston insisted on making at least a partial statement. He did n't say that he might never have another chance, but Delia felt with despair that this idea was in his mind. He was very gentle, very polite, but distinctly cold, she thought; he was intensely depressed and for half an hour uttered not the least little pleasantry. There was no particular occasion for that when he talked about "preferred bonds" with her father. This was a language Delia could n't translate, though she had heard it from childhood. He had a great many papers to show Mr. Dosson,

records of the mission of which he had acquitted himself, but Mr. Dosson pushed them into the drawer of the ormolu table with the remark that he guessed they were all right. Now, after the fact, he appeared to attach but little importance to Gaston's achievements — an attitude which Delia perceived to be slightly disconcerting to their visitor. Delia understood it: she had an instinctive sense that her father knew a great deal more than Gaston could tell him even about the work he had committed to him, and also that there was in such punctual settlements an eagerness, a literalism, totally foreign to Mr. Dosson's domestic habits and to which he would even have imputed a certain pettifogging provinciality — treatable however with dry humour. If Gaston had cooled off he wanted at least to be able to say that he had rendered them services in America; but now her father, for the moment at least, scarcely appeared to think his services worth speaking of: an incident that left him with more of the responsibility for his cooling. What Mr. Dosson wanted to know was how everything had struck him over there, especially the Pickett Building and the parlour-cars and Niagara and the hotels he had instructed him to go to, giving him an introduction in two or three cases to the gentleman in charge of the office. It was in relation to these themes that Gaston was guilty of a want of spring, as the girl phrased it to herself; that he could produce no appreciative expression. He declared however, repeatedly, that it was a most extraordinary country — most extraordinary and far beyond anything he had had any conception of. "Of course I

did n't like *everything*," he said, "any more than I like everything anywhere."

"Well, what did n't you like?" Mr. Dosson enquired, at this, after a short silence.

Gaston Probert made his choice. "Well, the light for instance."

"The light — the electric?"

"No, the solar! I thought it rather hard, too much like the scratching of a slate-pencil." As Mr. Dosson hereupon looked vague and rather as if the reference were to some enterprise (a great lamp company) of which he had not heard — conveying a suggestion that he was perhaps staying away too long, Gaston immediately added: "I really think Francie might come in. I wrote to her that I wanted particularly to see her."

"I'll go and call her — I'll make her come," said Delia at the door. She left her companions together and Gaston returned to the subject of Mr. Munster, Mr. Dosson's former partner, to whom he had taken a letter and who had shown him every sort of civility. Mr. Dosson was pleased at this; nevertheless he broke out suddenly:

"Look here, you know; if you've got anything to say that you don't think very acceptable you had better say it to *me*." Gaston changed colour, but his reply was checked by Delia's quick return. She brought the news that her sister would be obliged if he would go into the little dining-room — he would find her there. She had something for his ear that she could mention only in private. It was very comfortable; there was a lamp and a fire. "Well, I guess she

can take care of herself!" Mr. Dosson, at this, commented with a laugh. "What does she want to say to him?" he asked when Gaston had passed out.

"Gracious knows! She won't tell me. But it's too flat, at his age, to live in such terror."

"In such terror?"

"Why of your father. You've got to choose."

"How, to choose?"

"Why if there's a person you like and he does n't like."

"You mean you can't choose your father," said Mr. Dosson thoughtfully.

"Of course you can't."

"Well then please don't like any one. But perhaps *I* should like him," he added, faithful to his easier philosophy.

"I guess you'd have to," said Delia.

In the small *salle-à-manger*, when Gaston went in, Francie was standing by the empty table, and as soon as she saw him she began.

"You can't say I did n't tell you I should do something. I did nothing else from the first — I mean but tell you. So you were warned again and again. You knew what to expect."

"Ah don't say *that* again; if you knew how it acts on my nerves!" the young man groaned. "You speak as if you had done it on purpose — to carry out your absurd threat."

"Well, what does it matter when it's all over?"

"It's not all over. Would to God it were!"

The girl stared. "Don't you know what I sent for you to come in here for? To bid you good-bye."

He held her an instant as if in unbelievable view, and then "Francie, what on earth has got into you?" he broke out. "What deviltry, what poison?" It would have been strange and sad to an observer, the opposition of these young figures, so fresh, so candid, so meant for confidence, but now standing apart and looking at each other in a wan defiance that hardened their faces.

"Don't they despise me — don't they hate me? You do yourself! Certainly you'll be glad for me to break off and spare you decisions and troubles impossible to you."

"I don't understand; it's like some hideous dream!" Gaston Probert cried. "You act as if you were doing something for a wager, and you make it worse by your talk. I don't believe it — I don't believe a word of it."

"What don't you believe?" she asked.

"That you told him — that you told him knowingly. If you'll take that back (it's too monstrous!) if you'll deny it and give me your assurance that you were practised upon and surprised, everything can still be arranged."

"Do you want me to lie?" asked Francie Dosson. "I thought you'd like pleasant words."

"Oh Francie, Francie!" moaned the wretched youth with tears in his eyes.

"What can be arranged? What do you mean by everything?" she went on.

"Why they'll accept it; they'll ask for nothing more. It's your participation they can't forgive."

"*They* can't? Why do you talk to me of 'them'?

I'm not engaged to 'them'!" she said with a shrill little laugh.

"Oh Francie *I* am! And it's they who are buried beneath that filthy rubbish!"

She flushed at this characterisation of Mr. Flack's epistle, but returned as with more gravity: "I'm very sorry — very sorry indeed. But evidently I'm not delicate."

He looked at her, helpless and bitter. "It's not the newspapers in your country that would have made you so. Lord, they're too incredible! And the ladies have them on their tables."

"You told me we could n't here — that the Paris ones are too bad," said Francie.

"Bad they are, God knows; but they've never published anything like that — poured forth such a flood of impudence on decent quiet people who only want to be left alone."

Francie sank to a chair by the table as if she were too tired to stand longer, and with her arms spread out on the lamplit plush she looked up at him. "Was it there you saw it?"

He was on his feet opposite, and she made at this moment the odd reflexion that she had never "realised" he had such fine lovely uplifted eyebrows. "Yes, a few days before I sailed. I hated them from the moment I got there — I looked at them very little. But that was a chance. I opened the paper in the hall of an hotel — there was a big marble floor and spittoons! — and my eyes fell on that horror. It made me ill."

"Did you think it was me?" she patiently gaped.

"About as soon as I supposed it was my father. But I was too mystified, too tormented."

"Then why did n't you write to me, if you did n't think it was me?"

"Write to you? I wrote to you every three days," he cried.

"Not after that."

"Well, I may have omitted a post at the last — I thought it might be Delia," Gaston added in a moment.

"Oh she did n't want me to do it — the day I went with him, the day I told him. She tried to prevent me," Francie insisted.

"Would to God then she had!" he wailed.

"Have n't you told them she's delicate too?" she asked in her strange tone.

He made no answer to this; he only continued: "What power, in heaven's name, has he got over you? What spell has he worked?"

"He's a gay old friend — he helped us ever so much when we were first in Paris."

"But, my dearest child, what 'gaieties,' what friends — what a man to know!"

"If we had n't known him we should n't have known *you*. Remember it was Mr. Flack who brought us that day to Mr. Waterlow's."

"Oh you'd have come some other way," said Gaston, who made nothing of that.

"Not in the least. We knew nothing about any other way. He helped us in everything — he showed us everything. That was why I told him — when he asked me. I liked him for what he had done."

Gaston, who had now also seated himself, listened to this attentively. "I see. It was a kind of delicacy."

"Oh a 'kind'!" She desperately smiled.

He remained a little with his eyes on her face. "Was it for me?"

"Of course it was for you."

"Ah how strange you are!" he cried with tenderness. "Such contradictions — *on s'y perd*. I wish you'd say that to *them*, that way. Everything would be right."

"Never, never!" said the girl. "I've wronged them, and nothing will ever be the same again. It was fatal. If I felt as they do I too would loathe the person who should have done such a thing. It doesn't seem to me so bad — the thing in the paper; but you know best. You must go back to them. You know best," she repeated.

"They were the last, the last people in France, to do it to. The sense of desecration, of pollution, you see" — he explained as if for conscience.

"Oh you need n't tell me — I saw them all there!" she answered.

"It must have been a dreadful scene. But you *did n't* brave them, did you?"

"Brave them — what are you talking about? To you that idea's incredible!" she then hopelessly sighed.

But he would n't have this. "No, no — I can imagine cases." He clearly had *some* vision of independence, though he looked awful about it.

"But this is n't a case, hey?" she demanded. "Well then go back to them — go back," she repeated. At

this he half-threw himself across the table to seize her hands, but she drew away and, as he came nearer, pushed her chair back, springing up. "You know you did n't come here to tell me you 're ready to give them up."

"To give them up?" He only echoed it with all his woe at first. "I've been battling with them till I'm ready to drop. You don't know how they feel — how they *must* feel."

"Oh yes I do. All this has made me older, every hour."

"It has made you — so extraordinarily! — more beautiful," said Gaston Probert.

"I don't care. Nothing will induce me to consent to any sacrifice."

"Some sacrifice there must be. Give me time — give me time, I'll manage it. I only wish they had n't seen you there in the Bois."

"In the Bois?"

"That Marguerite had n't seen you — with that lying blackguard. That's the image they can't get over."

Well, it was as if it had been the thing she had got herself most prepared for — so that she must speak accordingly. "I see you can't either, Gaston. Anyhow I *was* there and I felt it all right. That's all I can say. You must take me as I am," said Francie Dosson.

"Don't — don't; you infuriate me!" he pleaded, frowning.

She had seemed to soften, but she was in a sudden flame again. "Of course I do, and I shall do it again. We're too terribly different. Everything makes you

so. You *can't* give them up — ever, ever. Good-bye — good-bye! That's all I wanted to tell you."

"I'll go and throttle him!" the young man almost howled.

"Very well, go! Good-bye." She had stepped quickly to the door and had already opened it, vanishing as she had done the other time.

"Francie, Francie!" he supplicated, following her into the passage. The door was not the one that led to the salon; it communicated with the other apartments. The girl had plunged into these — he already heard her push a sharp bolt. Presently he went away without taking leave of Mr. Dosson and Delia.

"Why he acts just like Mr. Flack," said the old man when they discovered that the interview in the dining-room had come to an end.

The next day was a bad one for Charles Waterlow, his work in the Avenue de Villiers being terribly interrupted. Gaston Probert invited himself to breakfast at noon and remained till the time at which the artist usually went out — an extravagance partly justified by the previous separation of several weeks. During these three or four hours Gaston walked up and down the studio while Waterlow either sat or stood before his easel. He put his host vastly out and acted on his nerves, but this easy genius was patient with him by reason of much pity, feeling the occasion indeed more of a crisis in the history of the troubled youth than the settlement of one question would make it. Waterlow's compassion was slightly tinged with contempt, for there was being settled above all, it seemed to him, and, alas, in the wrong sense, the question of his poor

friend's character. Gaston was in a fever; he broke out into passionate pleas — he relapsed into gloomy silences. He roamed about continually, his hands in his pockets and his hair in a tangle; he could take neither a decision nor a momentary rest. It struck his companion more than ever before that he was after all essentially a foreigner; he had the foreign sensibility, the sentimental candour, the need for sympathy, the communicative despair. A true young Anglo-Saxon would have buttoned himself up in his embarrassment and been dry and awkward and capable, and, however conscious of a pressure, unconscious of a drama; whereas Gaston was effusive and appealing and ridiculous and graceful — natural above all and egotistical. Indeed a true young Anglo-Saxon would n't have known the particular acuteness of such a quandary, for he would n't have parted to such an extent with his freedom of spirit. It was the fact of this surrender on his visitor's part that excited Waterlow's secret scorn: family feeling was all very well, but to see it triumph as a superstition calling for the blood-sacrifice made him feel he would as soon be a blackamoor on his knees before a fetish. He now measured for the first time the root it had taken in Gaston's nature. To act like a man the hope of the Proberts must pull up the root, even if the operation should be terribly painful, should be attended with cries and tears and contortions, with baffling scruples and a sense of sacrilege, the sense of siding with strangers against his own flesh and blood. Now and again he broke out: "And if you should see her as she looks just now — she 's too lovely, too touching! — you 'd see how right

I was originally, when I found her such a revelation of that rare type, the French Renaissance, you know, the one we talked about." But he reverted with at least equal frequency to the oppression he seemed unable to throw off, the idea of something done of cruel purpose and malice, with a refinement of outrage: such an accident to *them*, of all people on earth, the very last, the least thinkable, those who, he verily believed, would feel it more than any family in the world. When Waterlow asked what made them of so exceptionally fine a fibre he could only answer that they just happened to be — not enviably, if one would; it was his father's influence and example, his very genius, the worship of privacy and good manners, a hatred of all the new familiarities and profanations. The artist sought to know further, at last and rather wearily, what in two words was the practical question his friend desired he should consider. Whether he should be justified in throwing the girl over — was that the issue?

"Gracious goodness, no! For what sort of sneak do you take me? She made a mistake, but any innocent young creature might do that. It's whether it strikes you I should be justified in throwing *them* over."

"It depends upon the sense you attach to justification."

"I mean should I be miserably unhappy? Would it be in their power to make me so?"

"To try — certainly, if they're capable of anything so nasty. The only fair play for them is to let you alone," Waterlow wound up.

"Ah, they won't do that — they like me too much!" Gaston ingenuously cried.

"It's an odd way of liking! The best way to show their love will be to let you marry where your affections, and so many other charming things, are involved."

"Certainly — only they question the charming things. They feel she represents, poor little dear, such dangers, such vulgarities, such possibilities of doing other dreadful things, that it's upon *them* — I mean on those things — my happiness would be shattered."

"Well," the elder man rather dryly said, "if you yourself have no secrets for persuading them of the contrary I'm afraid I can't teach you one."

"Yes, I ought to do it myself," Gaston allowed in the candour of his meditations. Then he went on in his torment of hesitation: "They never believed in her from the first. My father was perfectly definite about it. At heart they never accepted her; they only pretended to do so because I guaranteed her *instincts* — that's what I did, heaven help me! and that she was incapable of doing a thing that could ever displease them. Then no sooner was my back turned than she perpetrated that!"

"That was your folly," Waterlow remarked, painting away.

"My folly — to turn my back?"

"No, no — to guarantee."

"My dear fellow, would n't you?" — and Gaston stared.

"Never in the world."

"You'd have thought her capable — ?"

"*Capabilissima!* And I should n't have cared."

"Do you think her then capable of breaking out again in some new way that's as bad?"

"I should n't care if she was. That's the least of all questions."

"The least?"

"Ah don't you see, wretched youth," cried the artist, pausing from his work and looking up — "don't you see that the question of her possibilities is as nothing compared to that of yours? She's the sweetest young thing I ever saw; but even if she happened not to be I should still urge you to marry her, in simple self-preservation."

Gaston kept echoing. "In self-preservation?"

"To save from destruction the last scrap of your independence. That's a much more important matter even than not treating her shabbily. They're doing their best to kill you morally — to render you incapable of individual life."

Gaston was immensely struck. "They are — they are!" he declared with enthusiasm.

"Well then, if you believe it, for heaven's sake go and marry her to-morrow!" Waterlow threw down his implements and added: "And come out of this — into the air."

Gaston, however, was planted in his path on the way to the door. "And if she goes again and does the very same?"

"The very same — ?" Waterlow thought.

"I mean something else as barbarous and as hard to bear."

"Well," said Waterlow, "you'll at least have got rid of your family."

"Yes, if she lets me in again I shall be glad they're not there! They're right, *pourtant*, they're right," Gaston went on, passing out of the studio with his friend.

"They're right?"

"It was unimaginable that she should."

"Yes, thank heaven! It was the finger of providence — providence taking you off your guard to give you your chance." This was ingenious, but, though he could glow for a moment in response to it, Francie's lover — if lover he may in his so infirm aspect be called — looked as if he mistrusted it, thought it slightly sophistical. What really shook him however was his companion's saying to him in the vestibule, when they had taken their hats and sticks and were on the point of going out: "Lord, man, how can you be so impenetrably dense? Don't you see that she's really of the softest finest material that breathes, that she's a perfect flower of plasticity, that everything you may have an apprehension about will drop away from her like the dead leaves from a rose and that you may make of her any perfect and enchanting thing you yourself have the wit to conceive?"

"Ah my dear friend!" — and poor Gaston, with another of his revulsions, panted for gratitude.

"The limit will be yours, not hers," Waterlow added.

"No, no, I've done with limits," his friend ecstatically cried.

That evening at ten o'clock Gaston presented him-

self at the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham and requested the German waiter to introduce him into the dining-room attached to Mr. Dosson's apartments and then go and tell Miss Francina he awaited her there.

"Oh you'll be better there than in the zalon — they've villed it with their luccatch," said the man, who always addressed him in an intention of English and was n't ignorant of the tie that united the visitor to the amiable American family, or perhaps even of the modifications it had lately undergone.

"With their luggage?"

"They leave to-morrow morning — *ach* I don't think they themselves know for where, sir."

"Please then say to Miss Francina that I've called on the most urgent business and am extraordinarily pressed."

The special ardour possessing Gaston at that moment belonged to the order of the communicative, but perhaps the vividness with which the waiter placed this exhibition of it before the young lady is better explained by the fact that her lover slipped a five-franc piece into his hand. She at any rate entered his place of patience sooner than Gaston had ventured to hope, though she corrected her promptitude a little by stopping short and drawing back when she saw how pale he was and how he looked as if he had been crying.

"I've chosen — I've chosen," he said expressively, smiling at her in denial of these indications.

"You've chosen?"

"I've had to give them up. But I like it so much

better than having to give *you* up! I took you first with their assent. That was well enough — it was worth trying for. But now I take you without it. We can live that way too."

"Ah I'm not worth it. You give up too much!" Francie returned. "We're going away — it's all over." She averted herself quickly, as if to carry out her meaning, but he caught her more quickly still and held her — held her fast and long. She had only freed herself when her father and sister broke in from the salon, attracted apparently by the audible commotion.

"Oh I thought you had at least knocked over the lamp!" Delia exclaimed.

"You must take me with you if you're going away, Mr. Dosson," Gaston said. "I'll start whenever you like."

"All right — where shall we go?" that amiable man asked.

"Had n't you decided that?"

"Well, the girls said they'd tell me."

"We were going home," Francie brought out.

"No we were n't — not a wee mite!" Delia professed.

"Oh not *there*," Gaston murmured, with a look of anguish at Francie.

"Well, when you've fixed it you can take the tickets," Mr. Dosson observed with detachment.

"To some place where there are no newspapers, darling," Gaston went on.

"I guess you'll have hard work to find one," Mr. Dosson pursued.

"Dear me, we need n't read them any more. We would n't have read that one if your family had n't forced us," Delia said to her prospective brother-in-law.

"Well, I shall never be forced — I shall never again in my life look at one," he very gravely declared.

"You 'll see, sir, — you 'll have to!" Mr. Dosson cheerfully persisted.

"No, you 'll tell us enough."

Francie had kept her eyes on the ground; the others were all now rather unnaturally smiling. "Won't they forgive me ever?" she asked, looking up.

"Yes, perfectly, if you can persuade me not to stick to you. But in that case what good will their forgiveness do you?"

"Well, perhaps it 's better to pay for it," the girl went on.

"To pay for it?"

"By suffering something. For it *was* dreadful," she solemnly gloomily said.

"Oh for all you 'll suffer —!" Gaston protested, shining down on her.

"It was for you — only for you, as I told you," Francie returned.

"Yes, don't tell me again — I don't like that explanation! I ought to let you know that my father now declines to do anything for me," the young man added to Mr. Dosson.

"To do anything for you?"

"To make me any allowance."

"Well, that makes me feel better. We don't want

your father's money, you know," this more soothable parent said with his mild sturdiness.

"There'll be enough for all; especially if we economise in newspapers" — Delia carried it elegantly off.

"Well, I don't know, after all — the *Reverberator* came for nothing," her father as gaily returned.

"Don't you be afraid he'll ever send it now!" she shouted in her return of confidence.

"I'm very sorry — because they were all lovely," Francie went on to Gaston with sad eyes.

"Let us wait to say that till they come back to us," he answered somewhat sententiously. He really cared little at this moment whether his relatives were lovely or not.

"I'm sure you won't have to wait long!" Delia remarked with the same cheerfulness.

"'Till they come back'?" Mr. Dosson repeated. "Ah they can't come back now, sir. We won't take them in!" The words fell from his lips with a fine unexpected austerity which imposed itself, producing a momentary silence, and it is a sign of Gaston's complete emancipation that he did n't in his heart resent this image of eventual favours denied his race. The resentment was rather Delia's, but she kept it to herself, for she was capable of reflecting with complacency that the key of the house would after all be hers, so that she could open the door for the Proberts if the Proberts should knock. Now that her sister's marriage was really to take place her consciousness that the American people would have been resoundingly told so was still more agreeable. The party left the Hôtel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham on the

morrow, but it appeared to the German waiter, as he accepted another five-franc piece from the happy and now reckless Gaston, that they were even yet not at all clear as to where they were going.

MADAME DE MAUVES

MADAME DE MAUVES

I

THE view from the terrace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye is immense and famous. Paris lies spread before you in dusky vastness, domed and fortified, glittering here and there through her light vapours and girdled with her silver Seine. Behind you is a park of stately symmetry, and behind that a forest where you may lounge through turfy avenues and light-chequered glades and quite forget that you are within half an hour of the boulevards. One afternoon, however, in mid-spring, some five years ago, a young man seated on the terrace had preferred to keep this in mind. His eyes were fixed in idle wistfulness on the mighty human hive before him. He was fond of rural things, and he had come to Saint-Germain a week before to meet the spring halfway; but though he could boast of a six months' acquaintance with the great city he never looked at it from his present vantage without a sense of curiosity still unappeased. There were moments when it seemed to him that not to be there just then was to miss some thrilling chapter of experience. And yet his winter's experience had been rather fruitless and he had closed the book almost with a yawn. Though not in the least a cynic he was what one may call a disappointed observer, and he never chose the right-hand road without be-

ginning to suspect after an hour's wayfaring that the left would have been the better. He now had a dozen minds to go to Paris for the evening, to dine at the Café Brébant and repair afterwards to the Gymnase and listen to the latest exposition of the duties of the injured husband. He would probably have risen to execute this project if he had not noticed a little girl who, wandering along the terrace, had suddenly stopped short and begun to gaze at him with round-eyed frankness. For a moment he was simply amused, the child's face denoting such helpless wonderment; the next he was agreeably surprised. "Why this is my friend Maggie," he said; "I see you've not forgotten me."

Maggie, after a short parley, was induced to seal her remembrance with a kiss. Invited then to explain her appearance at Saint-Germain, she embarked on a recital in which the general, according to the infantine method, was so fatally sacrificed to the particular that Longmore looked about him for a superior source of information. He found it in Maggie's mamma, who was seated with another lady at the opposite end of the terrace; so, taking the child by the hand, he led her back to her companions.

Maggie's mamma was a young American lady, as you would immediately have perceived, with a pretty and friendly face and a great elegance of fresh finery. She greeted Longmore with amazement and joy, mentioning his name to her friend and bidding him bring a chair and sit with them. The other lady, in whom, though she was equally young and perhaps even prettier, muslins and laces and feathers were

less of a feature, remained silent, stroking the hair of the little girl, whom she had drawn against her knee. She had never heard of Longmore, but she now took in that her companion had crossed the ocean with him, had met him afterwards in travelling and — having left her husband in Wall Street — was indebted to him for sundry services. Maggie's mamma turned from time to time and smiled at this lady with an air of invitation; the latter smiled back and continued gracefully to say nothing. For ten minutes, meanwhile, Longmore felt a revival of interest in his old acquaintance; then (as mild riddles are more amusing than mere commonplaces) it gave way to curiosity about her friend. His eyes wandered; her volubility shook a sort of sweetness out of the friend's silence.

The stranger was perhaps not obviously a beauty nor obviously an American, but essentially both for the really seeing eye. She was slight and fair and, though naturally pale, was delicately flushed just now, as by the effect of late agitation. What chiefly struck Longmore in her face was the union of a pair of beautifully gentle, almost languid grey eyes with a mouth that was all expression and intention. Her forehead was a trifle more expansive than belongs to classic types, and her thick brown hair dressed out of the fashion, just then even more ugly than usual. Her throat and bust were slender, but all the more in harmony with certain rapid charming movements of the head, which she had a way of throwing back every now and then with an air of attention and a sidelong glance from her dove-like eyes. She seemed

at once alert and indifferent, contemplative and restless, and Longmore very soon discovered that if she was not a brilliant beauty she was at least a most attaching one. This very impression made him magnanimous. He was certain he had interrupted a confidential conversation, and judged it discreet to withdraw, having first learned from Maggie's mamma — Mrs. Draper — that she was to take the six o'clock train back to Paris. He promised to meet her at the station.

He kept his appointment, and Mrs. Draper arrived betimes, accompanied by her friend. The latter, however, made her farewells at the door and drove away again, giving Longmore time only to raise his hat. "Who is she?" he asked with visible ardour as he brought the traveller her tickets.

"Come and see me to-morrow at the Hôtel de l'Empire," she answered, "and I'll tell you all about her." The force of this offer in making him punctual at the Hôtel de l'Empire Longmore doubtless never exactly measured; and it was perhaps well he was vague, for he found his friend, who was on the point of leaving Paris, so distracted by procrastinating milliners and perjured lingères that coherence had quite deserted her. "You must find Saint-Germain dreadfully dull," she nevertheless had the presence of mind to say as he was going. "Why won't you come with me to London?"

"Introduce me to Madame de Mauves," he answered, "and Saint-Germain will quite satisfy me." All he had learned was the lady's name and residence.

"Ah she, poor woman, won't make your affair a carnival. She's very unhappy," said Mrs. Draper.

Longmore's further enquiries were arrested by the arrival of a young lady with a bandbox; but he went away with the promise of a note of introduction, to be immediately dispatched to him at Saint-Germain.

He then waited a week, but the note never came, and he felt how little it was for Mrs. Draper to complain of engagements unperformed. He lounged on the terrace and walked in the forest, studied suburban street life and made a languid attempt to investigate the records of the court of the exiled Stuarts; but he spent most of his time in wondering where Madame de Mauves lived and whether she ever walked on the terrace. Sometimes, he was at last able to recognise; for one afternoon toward dusk he made her out from a distance, arrested there alone and leaning against the low wall. In his momentary hesitation to approach her there was almost a shade of trepidation, but his curiosity was not chilled by such a measure of the effect of a quarter of an hour's acquaintance. She at once recovered their connexion, on his drawing near, and showed it with the frankness of a person unprovided with a great choice of contacts. Her dress, her expression, were the same as before; her charm came out like that of fine music on a second hearing. She soon made conversation easy by asking him for news of Mrs. Draper. Longmore told her that he was daily expecting news and after a pause mentioned the promised note of introduction.

"It seems less necessary now," he said — "for me at least. But for you — I should have liked you to know the good things our friend would probably have been able to say about me."

"If it arrives at last," she answered, "you must come and see me and bring it. If it does n't you must come without it."

Then, as she continued to linger through the thickening twilight, she explained that she was waiting for her husband, who was to arrive in the train from Paris and who often passed along the terrace on his way home. Longmore well remembered that Mrs. Draper had spoken of uneasy things in her life, and he found it natural to guess that this same husband was the source of them. Edified by his six months in Paris, "What else is possible," he put it, "for a sweet American girl who marries an unholy foreigner?"

But this quiet dependence on her lord's return rather shook his shrewdness, and it received a further check from the free confidence with which she turned to greet an approaching figure. Longmore distinguished in the fading light a stoutish gentleman, on the fair side of forty, in a high grey hat, whose countenance, obscure as yet against the quarter from which it came, mainly presented to view the large outward twist of its moustache. M. de Mauves saluted his wife with punctilious gallantry and, having bowed to Longmore, asked her several questions in French. Before taking his offered arm to walk to their carriage, which was in waiting at the gate of the terrace, she introduced our hero as a

friend of Mrs. Draper and also a fellow countryman, whom she hoped they might have the pleasure of seeing, as she said, *chez eux*. M. de Mauves responded briefly, but civilly, in fair English, and led his wife away.

Longmore watched him as he went, renewing the curl of his main facial feature — watched him with an irritation devoid of any mentionable ground. His one pretext for gnashing his teeth would have been in his apprehension that this gentleman's worst English might prove a matter to shame his own best French. For reasons involved apparently in the very structure of his being Longmore found a colloquial use of that idiom as insecure as the back of a restive horse, and was obliged to take his exercise, as he was aware, with more tension than grace. He reflected meanwhile with comfort that Madame de Mauves and he had a common tongue, and his anxiety yielded to his relief at finding on his table that evening a letter from Mrs. Draper. It enclosed a short formal missive to Madame de Mauves, but the epistle itself was copious and confidential. She had deferred writing till she reached London, where for a week, of course, she had found other amusements.

"I think it's the sight of so many women here who don't look at all like her that has reminded me by the law of contraries of my charming friend at Saint-Germain and my promise to introduce you to her," she wrote. "I believe I spoke to you of her rather blighted state, and I wondered afterwards whether I had n't been guilty of a breach of con-

fidence. But you would certainly have arrived at guesses of your own, and, besides, she has never told me her secrets. The only one she ever pretended to was that she's the happiest creature in the world, after assuring me of which, poor thing, she went off into tears; so that I prayed to be delivered from such happiness. It's the miserable story of an American girl born neither to submit basely nor to rebel crookedly marrying a shining sinful Frenchman who believes a woman must do one or the other of those things. The lightest of *us* have a ballast that they can't imagine, and the poorest a moral imagination that they don't require. She was romantic and perverse — she thought the world she had been brought up in too vulgar or at least too prosaic. To have a decent home-life is n't perhaps the greatest of adventures; but I think she wishes nowadays she had n't gone in quite so desperately for thrills. M. de Mauves cared of course for nothing but her money, which he's spending royally on his *menus plaisirs*. I hope you appreciate the compliment I pay you when I recommend you to go and cheer up a lady domestically dejected. Believe me, I've given no other man a proof of this esteem; so if you were to take me in an inferior sense I would never speak to you again. Prove to this fine sore creature that our manners may have all the grace without wanting to make such selfish terms for it. She avoids society and lives quite alone, seeing no one but a horrible French sister-in-law. Do let me hear that you've made her patience a little less absent-minded. Make her *want* to forget; make her like you."

This ingenious appeal left the young man uneasy.

He found himself in presence of more complications than had been in his reckoning. To call on Madame de Mauves with his present knowledge struck him as akin to fishing in troubled waters. He was of modest composition, and yet he asked himself whether an appearance of attentions from any gallant gentleman might n't give another twist to her tangle. A flattering sense of unwonted opportunity, however — of such a possible value constituted for him as he had never before been invited to rise to — made him with the lapse of time more confident, possibly more reckless. It was too inspiring not to act upon the idea of kindling a truer light in his fair countrywoman's slow smile, and at least he hoped to persuade her that even a raw representative of the social order she had not done justice to was not necessarily a mere fortuitous collocation of atoms. He immediately called on her.

II

She had been placed for her education, fourteen years before, in a Parisian convent, by a widowed mamma who was fonder of Homburg and Nice than of letting out tucks in the frocks of a vigorously growing daughter. Here, besides various elegant accomplishments — the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea — she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a man of hierarchical "rank" — not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Madame la Vicomtesse, for which it seemed to her she should never greatly care, but because she had a romantic belief that the enjoyment of inherited and transmitted consideration, consideration attached to the fact of birth, would be the direct guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling. She supposed it would be found that the state of being noble does actually enforce the famous obligation. Romances are rarely worked out in such transcendent good faith, and Euphemia's excuse was the prime purity of her moral vision. She was essentially incorruptible, and she took this pernicious conceit to her bosom very much as if it had been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain nobleness of meaning, than

in well-attested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and enjoyment of a chance to carry further a family chronicle begun ever so far back must be, as a consciousness, a source of the most beautiful impulses. It was n't therefore only that *noblesse oblige*, she thought, as regards yourself, but that it ensures as nothing else does in respect to your wife. She had never, at the start, spoken to a nobleman in her life, and these convictions were but a matter of extravagant theory. They were the fruit, in part, of the perusal of various Ultramontane works of fiction — the only ones admitted to the convent library — in which the hero was always a Legitimist vicomte who fought duels by the dozen but went twice a month to confession; and in part of the strong social scent of the gossip of her companions, many of them *filles de haut lieu* who, in the convent-garden, after Sundays at home, depicted their brothers and cousins as Prince Charmings and young Paladins. Euphemia listened and said nothing; she shrouded her visions of matrimony under a coronet in the silence that mostly surrounds all ecstatic faith. She was not of that type of young lady who is easily induced to declare that her husband must be six feet high and a little near-sighted, part his hair in the middle and have amber lights in his beard. To her companions her flights of fancy seemed short, rather, and poor and untutored; and even the fact that she was a sprig of the transatlantic democracy never sufficiently explained her apathy on social questions. She had a mental image of that son of the Crusaders

who was to suffer her to adore him, but like many an artist who has produced a masterpiece of idealisation she shrank from exposing it to public criticism. It was the portrait of a gentleman rather ugly than handsome and rather poor than rich. But his ugliness was to be nobly expressive and his poverty delicately proud. She had a fortune of her own which, at the proper time, after fixing on her in eloquent silence those fine eyes that were to soften the feudal severity of his visage, he was to accept with a world of stifled protestations. One condition alone she was to make — that he should have "race" in a state as documented as it was possible to have it. On this she would stake her happiness; and it was so to happen that several accidents conspired to give convincing colour to this artless philosophy.

Inclined to long pauses and slow approaches herself, Euphemia was a great sitter at the feet of breathless volubility, and there were moments when she fairly hung upon the lips of Mademoiselle Marie de Mauves. Her intimacy with this chosen schoolmate was founded on the perception — all her own — that their differences were just the right ones. Mademoiselle de Mauves was very positive, very shrewd, very ironical, very French — everything that Euphemia felt herself unpardonable for not being. During her Sundays *en ville* she had examined the world and judged it, and she imparted her impressions to our attentive heroine with an agreeable mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism. She was moreover a handsome and well-grown person, on whom Euphemia's ribbons and trinkets had a trick of looking better

than on their slender proprietress. She had finally the supreme merit of being a rigorous example of the virtue of exalted birth, having, as she did, ancestors honourably mentioned by Joinville and Commines, and a stately grandmother with a hooked nose who came up with her after the holidays from a veritable *castel* in Auvergne. It seemed to our own young woman that these attributes made her friend more at home in the world than if she had been the daughter of even the most prosperous grocer. A certain aristocratic impudence Mademoiselle de Mauves abundantly possessed, and her raids among her friend's finery were quite in the spirit of her baronial ancestors in the twelfth century — a spirit regarded by Euphemia but as a large way of understanding friendship, a freedom from conformities without style, and one that would sooner or later express itself in acts of surprising magnanimity. There doubtless prevailed in the breast of Mademoiselle de Mauves herself a dimmer vision of the large securities that Euphemia envied her. She was to become later in life so accomplished a schemer that her sense of having further heights to scale might well have waked up early. The especially fine appearance made by our heroine's ribbons and trinkets as her friend wore them ministered to pleasure on both sides, and the spell was not of a nature to be menaced by the young American's general gentleness. The concluding motive of Marie's writing to her grandmamma to invite Euphemia for a three weeks' holiday to the *castel* in Auvergne involved, however, the subtlest considerations. Mademoiselle de Mauves indeed, at

this time seventeen years of age and capable of views as wide as her wants, was as proper a figure as could possibly have been found for the foreground of a scene artfully designed; and Euphemia, whose years were of like number, asked herself if a right harmony with such a place might n't come by humble prayer. It is a proof of the sincerity of the latter's aspirations that the *castel* was not a shock to her faith. It was neither a cheerful nor a luxurious abode, but it was as full of wonders as a box of old heirlooms or objects "willed." It had battered towers and an empty moat, a rusty drawbridge and a court paved with crooked grass-grown slabs over which the antique coach-wheels of the lady with the hooked nose seemed to awaken the echoes of the seventeenth century. Euphemia was not frightened out of her dream; she had the pleasure of seeing all the easier passages translated into truth, as the learner of a language begins with the common words. She had a taste for old servants, old anecdotes, old furniture, faded household colours and sweetly stale odours — musty treasures in which the Château de Mauves abounded. She made a dozen sketches in water-colours after her conventual pattern; but sentimentally, as one may say, she was for ever sketching with a freer hand.

Old Madame de Mauves had nothing severe but her nose, and she seemed to Euphemia — what indeed she had every claim to pass for — the very image and pattern of an "historical character." Belonging to a great order of things, she patronised the young stranger who was ready to sit all day

at her feet and listen to anecdotes of the *bon temps* and quotations from the family chronicles. Madame de Mauves was a very honest old woman; she uttered her thoughts with ancient plainness. One day after pushing back Euphemia's shining locks and blinking with some tenderness from behind an immense *face-à-main* that acted as for the relegation of the girl herself to the glass case of a museum, she declared with an energetic shake of the head that she did n't know what to make of such a little person. And in answer to the little person's evident wonder, "I should like to advise you," she said, "but you seem to me so all of a piece that I 'm afraid that if I advise you I shall spoil you. It 's easy to see you 're not one of us. I don't know whether you 're better, but you seem to me to have been wound up by some key that is n't kept by your governess or your confessor or even your mother, but that you wear by a fine black ribbon round your own neck. Little persons in my day — when they were stupid they were very docile, but when they were clever they were very sly! You 're clever enough, I imagine, and yet if I guessed all your secrets at this moment is there one I should have to frown at ? I can tell you a wickeder one than any you 've discovered for yourself. If you wish to live at ease in the *doux pays de France* don't trouble too much about the key of your conscience or even about your conscience itself — I mean your own particular one. You 'll fancy it saying things it won't help your case to hear. They 'll make you sad, and when you 're sad you 'll grow plain, and when you 're plain you 'll grow bitter, and when you 're bitter you 'll

be *peu aimable*. I was brought up to think that a woman's first duty is to be infinitely so, and the happiest women I've known have been in fact those who performed this duty faithfully. As you're not a Catholic I suppose you can't be a dévote; and if you don't take life as a fifty years' mass the only way to take it's as a game of skill. Listen to this. Not to lose at the game of life you must — I don't say cheat, but not be too sure your neighbour won't, and not be shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear — I beseech you don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous, and if you find your neighbour peeping don't cry out; only very politely wait your own chance. I've had my revenge more than once in my day, but I really think the sweetest I could take, *en somme*, against the past I've known, would be to have your blest innocence profit by my experience."

This was rather bewildering advice, but Euphemia understood it too little to be either edified or frightened. She sat listening to it very much as she would have listened to the speeches of an old lady in a comedy whose diction should strikingly correspond to the form of her high-backed armchair and the fashion of her coif. Her indifference was doubly dangerous, for Madame de Mauves spoke at the instance of coming events, and her words were the result of a worry of scruples — scruples in the light of which Euphemia was on the one hand too tender a victim to be sacrificed to an ambition and the prosperity of her own house on the other too precious a heritage to be sacrificed to an hesitation. The prosperity in

question had suffered repeated and grievous breaches and the menaced institution been overmuch pervaded by that cold comfort in which people are obliged to balance dinner-table allusions to feudal ancestors against the absence of side-dishes; a state of things the sorrier as the family was now mainly represented by a gentleman whose appetite was large and who justly maintained that its historic glories had n't been established by underfed heroes.

Three days after Euphemia's arrival Richard de Mauves, coming down from Paris to pay his respects to his grandmother, treated our heroine to her first encounter with a gentilhomme in the flesh. On appearing he kissed his grandmother's hand with a smile which caused her to draw it away with dignity, and set Euphemia, who was standing by, to ask herself what could have happened between them. Her unanswered wonder was but the beginning of a long chain of puzzlements, but the reader is free to know that the smile of M. de Mauves was a reply to a postscript affixed by the old lady to a letter addressed to him by her granddaughter as soon as the girl had been admitted to justify the latter's promises. Mademoiselle de Mauves brought her letter to her grandmother for approval, but obtained no more than was expressed in a frigid nod. The old lady watched her with this coldness while she proceeded to seal the letter, then suddenly bade her open it again and bring her a pen.

"Your sister's flatteries are all nonsense," she wrote; "the young lady's far too good for you, *mauvais sujet* beyond redemption. If you've a par-

ticle of conscience you'll not come and disturb the repose of an angel of innocence."

The other relative of the subject of this warning, who had read these lines, made up a little face as she freshly indited the address; but she laid down her pen with a confident nod which might have denoted that by her judgement her brother was appealed to on the ground of a principle that did n't exist in him. And "if you meant what you said," the young man on his side observed to his grandmother on his first private opportunity, "it would have been simpler not to have sent the letter."

Put out of humour perhaps by this gross impugnment of her sincerity, the head of the family kept her room on pretexts during a greater part of Euphemia's stay, so that the latter's angelic innocence was left all to her grandson's mercy. It suffered no worse mischance, however, than to be prompted to intenser communion with itself. Richard de Mauves was the hero of the young girl's romance made real, and so completely accordant with this creature of her imagination that she felt afraid of him almost as she would have been of a figure in a framed picture who should have stepped down from the wall. He was now thirty-three — young enough to suggest possibilities of ardent activity and old enough to have formed opinions that a simple woman might deem it an intellectual privilege to listen to. He was perhaps a trifle handsomer than Euphemia's rather grim Quixotic ideal, but a very few days reconciled her to his good looks as effectually they would have reconciled her to a characterised want of them. He was

quiet, grave, eminently distinguished. He spoke little, but his remarks, without being sententious, had a nobleness of tone that caused them to re-echo in the young girl's ears at the end of the day. He paid her very little direct attention, but his chance words — when he only asked her if she objected to his cigarette — were accompanied by a smile of extraordinary kindness.

It happened that shortly after his arrival, riding an unruly horse which Euphemia had with shy admiration watched him mount in the castle-yard, he was thrown with a violence which, without disparaging his skill, made him for a fortnight an interesting invalid lounging in the library with a bandaged knee. To beguile his confinement the accomplished young stranger was repeatedly induced to sing for him, which she did with a small natural tremor that might have passed for the finish of vocal art. He never overwhelmed her with compliments, but he listened with unfailing attention, remembered all her melodies and would sit humming them to himself. While his imprisonment lasted indeed he passed hours in her company, making her feel not unlike some unfriended artist who has suddenly gained the opportunity to devote a fortnight to the study of a great model. Euphemia studied with noiseless diligence what she supposed to be the "character" of M. de Mauves, and the more she looked the more fine lights and shades she seemed to behold in this masterpiece of nature. M. de Mauves's character indeed, whether from a sense of being so generously and intensely taken for granted, or for reasons

which bid graceful defiance to analysis, had never been so much on show, even to the very casual critic lodged, as might be said, in an out-of-the-way corner of it; it seemed really to reflect the purity of Euphemia's pious opinion. There had been nothing especially to admire in the state of mind in which he left Paris — a settled resolve to marry a young person whose charms might or might not justify his sister's account of them, but who was mistress, at the worst, of a couple of hundred thousand francs a year. He had not counted out sentiment — if she pleased him so much the better; but he had left a meagre margin for it and would hardly have admitted that so excellent a match could be improved by it. He was a robust and serene sceptic, and it was a singular fate for a man who believed in nothing to be so tenderly believed in. What his original faith had been he could hardly have told you, for as he came back to his childhood's home to mend his fortunes by pretending to fall in love he was a thoroughly perverse creature and overlaid with more corruptions than a summer day's questioning of his conscience would have put to flight. Ten years' pursuit of pleasure, which a bureau full of unpaid bills was all he had to show for, had pretty well stifled the natural lad whose violent will and generous temper might have been shaped by a different pressure to some such showing as would have justified a romantic faith. So should he have exhaled the natural fragrance of a late-blooming flower of hereditary honour. His violence indeed had been subdued and he had learned to be irreproachably polite; but he had lost

the fineness of his generosity, and his politeness, which in the long run society paid for, was hardly more than a form of luxurious egotism, like his fondness for ciphered pocket-handkerchiefs, lavender gloves and other fopperies by which shopkeepers remained out of pocket. In after-years he was terribly polite to his wife. He had formed himself, as the phrase was, and the form prescribed to him by the society into which his birth and his tastes had introduced him was marked by some peculiar features. That which mainly concerns us is its classification of the fairer half of humanity as objects not essentially different — say from those very lavender gloves that are soiled in an evening and thrown away. To do M. de Mauves justice, he had in the course of time encountered in the feminine character such plentiful evidence of its pliant softness and fine adjustability that idealism naturally seemed to him a losing game.

Euphemia, as he lay on his sofa, struck him as by no means contradictory; she simply reminded him that very young women are generally innocent and that this is on the whole the most potent source of their attraction. Her innocence moved him to perfect consideration, and it seemed to him that if he shortly became her husband it would be exposed to a danger the less. Old Madame de Mauves, who flattered herself that in this whole matter she was very laudably rigid, might almost have taken a lesson from the delicacy he practised. For two or three weeks her grandson was well-nigh a blushing boy again. He watched from behind the *Figaro*, he

admired and desired and held his tongue. He found himself not in the least moved to a flirtation; he had no wish to trouble the waters he proposed to transfuse into the golden cup of matrimony. Sometimes a word, a look, a gesture of Euphemia's gave him the oddest sense of being, or of seeming at least, almost bashful; for she had a way of not dropping her eyes according to the mysterious virginal mechanism, of not fluttering out of the room when she found him there alone, of treating him rather as a glorious than as a pernicious influence — a radiant frankness of demeanour in fine, despite an infinite natural reserve, which it seemed at once graceless not to be complimentary about and indelicate not to take for granted. In this way had been wrought in the young man's mind a vague unwonted resonance of soft impressions, as we may call it, which resembled the happy stir of the change from dreaming pleasantly to waking happily. His imagination was touched; he was very fond of music and he now seemed to give easy ear to some of the sweetest he had ever heard. In spite of the bore of being laid up with a lame knee he was in better humour than he had known for months; he lay smoking cigarettes and listening to the nightingales with the satisfied smile of one of his country neighbours whose big ox should have taken the prize at a fair. Every now and then, with an impatient suspicion of the resemblance, he declared himself pitifully *bête;* but he was under a charm that braved even the supreme penalty of seeming ridiculous. One morning he had half an hour's *tête-à-tête* with his grandmother's

confessor, a soft-voiced old Abbé whom, for reasons of her own, Madame de Mauves had suddenly summoned and had left waiting in the drawing-room while she rearranged her curls. His reverence, going up to the old lady, assured her that M. le Comte was in a most edifying state of mind and the likeliest subject for the operation of grace. This was a theological interpretation of the count's unusual equanimity. He had always lazily wondered what priests were good for, and he now remembered, with a sense of especial obligation to the Abbé, that they were excellent for marrying people.

A day or two after this he left off his bandages and tried to walk. He made his way into the garden and hobbled successfully along one of the alleys, but in the midst of his progress was pulled up by a spasm of pain which forced him to stop and call for help. In an instant Euphemia came tripping along the path and offered him her arm with the frankest solicitude.

"Not to the house," he said, taking it; "further on, to the bosquet." This choice was prompted by her having immediately confessed that she had seen him leave the house, had feared an accident and had followed him on tiptoe.

"Why did n't you join me?" he had asked, giving her a look in which admiration was no longer disguised and yet felt itself half at the mercy of her replying that a *jeune fille* should n't be seen following a gentleman. But it drew a breath which filled its lungs for a long time afterwards when she replied simply that if she had overtaken him he might

have accepted her arm out of politeness, whereas she wished to have the pleasure of seeing him walk alone.

The bosquet was covered with an odorous tangle of blossoming creepers, and a nightingale overhead was shaking out love-notes with a profusion that made the Count feel his own conduct the last word of propriety. "I've always heard that in America, when a man wishes to marry a young girl, he offers himself simply face to face and without ceremony — without parents and uncles and aunts and cousins sitting round in a circle."

"Why I believe so," said Euphemia, staring and too surprised to be alarmed.

"Very well then — suppose our arbour here to be your great sensible country. I offer you my hand à l'Américaine. It will make me intensely happy to feel you accept it."

Whether Euphemia's acceptance was in the American manner is more than I can say; I incline to think that for fluttering grateful trustful softly-amazed young hearts there is only one manner all over the world.

That evening, in the massive turret chamber it was her happiness to inhabit, she wrote a dutiful letter to her mamma, and had just sealed it when she was sent for by Madame de Mauves. She found this ancient lady seated in her boudoir in a lavender satin gown and with her candles all lighted as for the keeping of some fête. "Are you very happy?" the old woman demanded, making Euphemia sit down before her.

"I'm almost afraid to say so, lest I should wake myself up."

"May you never wake up, *belle enfant*," Madame de Mauves grandly returned. "This is the first marriage ever made in our family in this way — by a Comte de Mauves proposing to a young girl in an arbour like Jeannot and Jeannette. It has not been our way of doing things, and people may say it wants frankness. My grandson tells me he regards it — for the conditions — as the perfection of good taste. Very well. I'm a very old woman, and if your differences should ever be as marked as your agreements I should n't care to see them. But I should be sorry to die and think you were going to be unhappy. You can't be, my dear, beyond a certain point; because, though in this world the Lord sometimes makes light of our expectations he never altogether ignores our deserts. But you're very young and innocent and easy to dazzle. There never was a man in the world — among the saints themselves — as good as you believe my grandson. But he's a *galant homme* and a gentleman, and I've been talking to him to-night. To you I want to say this — that you're to forget the worldly rubbish I talked the other day about the happiness of frivolous women. It's not the kind of happiness that would suit you, *ma toute-belle*. Whatever befalls you, promise me this: to be, to remain, your own sincere little self only, charming in your own serious little way. The Comtesse de Mauves will be none the worse for it. Your brave little self, understand, in spite of everything — bad precepts and bad examples, bad fortune and

even bad usage. Be persistently and patiently just what the good God has made you, and even one of us — and one of those who is most what we *are* — will do you justice!"

Euphemia remembered this speech in after-years, and more than once, wearily closing her eyes, she seemed to see the old woman sitting upright in her faded finery and smiling grimly like one of the Fates who sees the wheel of fortune turning up her favourite event. But at the moment it had for her simply the proper gravity of the occasion: this was the way, she supposed, in which lucky young girls were addressed on their engagement by wise old women of quality.

At her convent, to which she immediately returned, she found a letter from her mother which disconcerted her far more than the remarks of Madame de Mauves. Who were these people, Mrs. Cleve demanded, who had presumed to talk to her daughter of marriage without asking her leave? Questionable gentlefolk plainly; the best French people never did such things. Euphemia would return straightway to her convent, shut herself up and await her own arrival. It took Mrs. Cleve three weeks to travel from Nice to Paris, and during this time the young girl had no communication with her lover beyond accepting a bouquet of violets marked with his initials and left by a female friend. "I've not brought you up with such devoted care," she declared to her daughter at their first interview, "to marry a presumptuous and penniless Frenchman. I shall take you straight home and you'll please forget M. de Mauves."

Mrs. Cleve received that evening at her hotel a visit from this personage which softened her wrath but failed to modify her decision. He had very good manners, but she was sure he had horrible morals; and the lady, who had been a good-natured censor on her own account, felt a deep and real need to sacrifice her daughter to propriety. She belonged to that large class of Americans who make light of their native land in familiar discourse but are startled back into a sense of having blasphemed when they find Europeans taking them at their word. "I know the type, my dear," she said to her daughter with a competent nod. "He won't beat you. Sometimes you'll wish he would."

Euphemia remained solemnly silent, for the only answer she felt capable of making was that her mother's mind was too small a measure of things and her lover's type an historic, a social masterpiece that it took some mystic illumination to appreciate. A person who confounded him with the common throng of her watering-place acquaintance was not a person to argue with. It struck the girl she had simply no cause to plead; her cause was in the Lord's hands and in those of M. de Mauves.

This agent of Providence had been irritated and mortified by Mrs. Cleve's opposition, and hardly knew how to handle an adversary who failed to perceive that a member of his family gave of necessity more than he received. But he had obtained information on his return to Paris which exalted the uses of humility. Euphemia's fortune, wonderful to say, was greater than its fame, and in view of such a prize,

even a member of his family could afford to take a snubbing.

The young man's tact, his deference, his urbane insistence, won a concession from Mrs. Cleve. The engagement was to be put off and her daughter was to return home, be brought out and receive the homage she was entitled to and which might well take a form representing peril to the suit of this first headlong aspirant. They were to exchange neither letters nor mementoes nor messages; but if at the end of two years Euphemia had refused offers enough to attest the permanence of her attachment he should receive an invitation to address her again. This decision was promulgated in the presence of the parties interested. The Count bore himself gallantly, looking at his young friend as if he expected some tender protestation. But she only looked at him silently in return, neither weeping nor smiling nor putting out her hand. On this they separated, and as M. de Mauves walked away he declared to himself that in spite of the confounded two years he was one of the luckiest of men — to have a fiancée who to several millions of francs added such strangely beautiful eyes.

How many offers Euphemia refused but scantily concerns us — and how the young man wore his two years away. He found he required pastimes, and as pastimes were expensive he added heavily to the list of debts to be cancelled by Euphemia's fortune. Sometimes, in the thick of what he had once called pleasure with a keener conviction than now, he put to himself the case of their failing him after

all; and then he remembered that last mute assurance of her pale face and drew a long breath of such confidence as he felt in nothing else in the world save his own punctuality in an affair of honour.

At last, one morning, he took the express to Havre with a letter of Mrs. Cleve's in his pocket, and ten days later made his bow to mother and daughter in New York. His stay was brief, and he was apparently unable to bring himself to view what Euphemia's uncle, Mr. Butterworth, who gave her away at the altar, called our great experiment of democratic self-government, in a serious light. He smiled at everything and seemed to regard the New World as a colossal *plaisanterie*. It is true that a perpetual smile was the most natural expression of countenance for a man about to marry Euphemia Cleve.

III

Longmore's first visit seemed to open to him so large a range of quiet pleasure that he very soon paid a second, and at the end of a fortnight had spent uncounted hours in the little drawing-room which Madame de Mauves rarely quitted except to drive or walk in the forest. She lived in an old-fashioned pavilion, between a high-walled court and an excessively artificial garden, beyond whose enclosure you saw a long line of tree-tops. Longmore liked the garden and in the mild afternoons used to move his chair through the open window to the smooth terrace which overlooked it while his hostess sat just within. Presently she would come out and wander through the narrow alleys and beside the thin-spouting fountain, and at last introduce him to a private gate in the high wall, the opening to a lane which led to the forest. Hitherwards she more than once strolled with him, bareheaded and meaning to go but twenty rods, but always going good-naturedly further and often stretching it to the freedom of a *promenade*. They found many things to talk about, and to the pleasure of feeling the hours slip along like some silver stream Longmore was able to add the satisfaction of suspecting that he was a "resource" for Madame de Mauves. He had made her acquaintance with the sense, not wholly inspiring, that she was a woman with a painful twist in her life and that

seeking her acquaintance would be like visiting at a house where there was an invalid who could bear no noise. But he very soon recognised that her grievance, if grievance it was, was not aggressive; that it was not fond of attitudes and ceremonies, and that her most earnest wish was to remember it as little as possible. He felt that even if Mrs. Draper had n't told him she was unhappy he would have guessed it, and yet that he could n't have pointed to his proof. The evidence was chiefly negative — she never alluded to her husband. Beyond this it seemed to him simply that her whole being was pitched in a lower key than harmonious Nature had designed; she was like a powerful singer who had lost her high notes. She never drooped nor sighed nor looked unutterable things; she dealt no sarcastic digs at her fate; she had in short none of the conscious graces of the woman wronged. Only Longmore was sure that her gentle gaiety was but the milder or sharper flush of a settled ache, and that she but tried to interest herself in his thoughts in order to escape from her own. If she had wished to irritate his curiosity and lead him to take her confidence by storm nothing could have served her purpose better than this studied discretion. He measured the rare magnanimity of self-effacement so deliberate, he felt how few women were capable of exchanging a luxurious woe for a thankless effort. Madame de Mauves, he himself felt, was n't sweeping the horizon for a compensation or a consoler; she had suffered a personal deception that had disgusted her with persons. She was n't planning to get the worth of her trouble

back in some other way; for the present she was proposing to live with it peaceably, reputably and without scandal — turning the key on it occasionally as you would on a companion liable to attacks of insanity. Longmore was a man of fine senses and of a speculative spirit, leading-strings that had never been slipped. He began to regard his hostess as a figure haunted by a shadow which was somehow her intenser and more authentic self. This lurking duality in her put on for him an extraordinary charm. Her delicate beauty acquired to his eye the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek statues; and sometimes when his imagination, more than his ear, detected a vague tremor in the tone in which she attempted to make a friendly question seem to have behind it none of the hollow resonance of absent-mindedness, his marvelling eyes gave her an answer more eloquent, though much less to the point, than the one she demanded.

She supplied him indeed with much to wonder about, so that he fitted, in his ignorance, a dozen high-flown theories to her apparent history. She had married for love and staked her whole soul on it; of that he was convinced. She had n't changed her allegiance to be near Paris and her base of supplies of millinery; he was sure she had seen her perpetrated mistake in a light of which her present life, with its conveniences for shopping and its moral aridity, was the absolute negation. But by what extraordinary process of the heart — through what mysterious intermission of that moral instinct which may keep pace with the heart even when this organ

is making unprecedented time — had she fixed her affections on an insolently frivolous Frenchman? Longmore needed no telling; he knew that M. de Mauves was both cynical and shallow; these things were stamped on his eyes, his nose, his mouth, his voice, his gesture, his step. Of Frenchwomen themselves, when all was said, our young man, full of nursed discriminations, went in no small fear; they all seemed to belong to the type of a certain fine lady to whom he had ventured to present a letter of introduction and whom, directly after his first visit to her, he had set down in his note-book as "metallic." Why should Madame de Mauves have chosen a Frenchwoman's lot — she whose nature had an atmospheric envelope absent even from the brightest metals? He asked her one day frankly if it had cost her nothing to transplant herself — if she were n't oppressed with a sense of irreconcileable difference from "all these people." She replied nothing at first, till he feared she might think it her duty to resent a question that made light of all her husband's importances. He almost wished she would; it would seem a proof that her policy of silence had a limit.

"I almost grew up here," she said at last, "and it was here for me those visions of the future took shape that we all have when we begin to think or to dream beyond mere playtime. As matters stand one may be very American and yet arrange it with one's conscience to live in Europe. My imagination perhaps — I had a little when I was younger — helped me to think I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does it signify? This is n't

America, no — this element, but it's quite as little France. France is out there beyond the garden, France is in the town and the forest; but here, close about me, in my room and" — she paused a moment — "in my mind, it's a nameless, and doubtless not at all remarkable, little country of my own. It's not her country," she added, "that makes a woman happy or unhappy."

Madame Clairin, Euphemia's sister-in-law, might meanwhile have been supposed to have undertaken the graceful task of making Longmore ashamed of his uncivil jottings about her sex and nation. Mademoiselle de Mauves, bringing example to the confirmation of precept, had made a remunerative match and sacrificed her name to the millions of a prosperous and aspiring wholesale druggist — a gentleman liberal enough to regard his fortune as a moderate price for being towed into circles unpervaded by pharmaceutic odours. His system possibly was sound, but his own application of it to be deplored. M. Clairin's head was turned by his good luck. Having secured an aristocratic wife he adopted an aristocratic vice and began to gamble at the Bourse. In an evil hour he lost heavily, and then staked heavily to recover himself. But he was to learn that the law of compensation works with no such pleasing simplicity, and he rolled to the dark bottom of his folly. There he felt everything go — his wits, his courage, his probity, everything that had made him what his fatuous marriage had so promptly unmade. He walked up the Rue Vivienne with his hands in his empty pockets and stood half an hour staring

confusedly up and down the brave boulevard. People brushed against him and half a dozen carriages almost ran over him, until at last a policeman, who had been watching him for some time, took him by the arm and led him gently away. He looked at the man's cocked hat and sword with tears in his eyes; he hoped for some practical application of the wrath of heaven, something that would express violently his dead-weight of self-abhorrence. The *sergent de ville*, however, only stationed him in the embrasure of a door, out of harm's way, and walked off to supervise a financial contest between an old lady and a cabman. Poor M. Clairin had only been married a year, but he had had time to measure the great spirit of true children of the *anciens preux*. When night had fallen he repaired to the house of a friend and asked for a night's lodging; and as his friend, who was simply his old head book-keeper and lived in a small way, was put to some trouble to accommodate him, "You must pardon me," the poor man said, "but I can't go home. I'm afraid of my wife!" Toward morning he blew his brains out. His widow turned the remnants of his property to better account than could have been expected and wore the very handsomest mourning. It was for this latter reason perhaps that she was obliged to retrench at other points and accept a temporary home under her brother's roof.

Fortune had played Madame Clairin a terrible trick, but had found an adversary and not a victim. Though quite without beauty she had always had what is called the grand air, and her air from this time

forth was grander than ever. As she trailed about in her sable furbelows, tossing back her well-dressed head and holding up her vigilant long-handled eyeglass, she seemed to be sweeping the whole field of society and asking herself where she should pluck her revenge. Suddenly she espied it, ready made to her hand, in poor Longmore's wealth and amiability. American dollars and American complaisance had made her brother's fortune; why should n't they make hers? She overestimated the wealth and misinterpreted the amiability; for she was sure a man could neither be so contented without being rich nor so "backward" without being weak. Longmore met her advances with a formal politeness that covered a good deal of unflattering discomposure. She made him feel deeply uncomfortable; and though he was at a loss to conceive how he could be an object of interest to a sharp Parisienne he had an indefinable sense of being enclosed in a magnetic circle, of having become the victim of an incantation. If Madame Clairin could have fathomed his Puritanic soul she would have laid by her wand and her book and dismissed him for an impossible subject. She gave him a moral chill, and he never named her to himself save as that dreadful woman — that awful woman. He did justice to her grand air, but for his pleasure he preferred the small air of Madame de Mauves; and he never made her his bow, after standing frigidly passive for five minutes to one of her gracious overtures to intimacy, without feeling a peculiar desire to ramble away into the forest, fling himself down on the warm grass and, staring up at the blue

sky, forget that there were any women in nature who did n't please like the swaying tree-tops. One day, on his arrival at the house, she met him in the court with the news that her sister-in-law was shut up with a headache and that his visit must be for *her*. He followed her into the drawing-room with the best grace at his command, and sat twirling his hat for half an hour. Suddenly he understood her; her caressing cadences were so almost explicit an invitation to solicit the charming honour of her hand. He blushed to the roots of his hair and jumped up with uncontrollable alacrity; then, dropping a glance at Madame Clairin, who sat watching him with hard eyes over the thin edge of her smile, perceived on her brow a flash of unforgiving wrath. It was not pleasing in itself, but his eyes lingered a moment, for it seemed to show off her character. What he saw in the picture frightened him and he felt himself murmur "Poor Madame de Mauves!" His departure was abrupt, and this time he really went into the forest and lay down on the grass.

After which he admired his young countrywoman more than ever; her intrinsic clearness shone out to him even through the darker shade cast over it. At the end of a month he received a letter from a friend with whom he had arranged a tour through the Low Countries, reminding him of his promise to keep their tryst at Brussels. It was only after his answer was posted that he fully measured the zeal with which he had declared that the journey must either be deferred or abandoned — since he could n't possibly leave Saint-Germain. He took a walk in the forest

and asked himself if this were indeed portentously true. Such a truth somehow made it surely his duty to march straight home and put together his effects. Poor Webster, who, he knew, had counted ardently on this excursion, was the best of men; six weeks ago he would have gone through anything to join poor Webster. It had never been in his books to throw overboard a friend whom he had loved ten years for a married woman whom he had six weeks — well, admired. It was certainly beyond question that he hung on at Saint-Germain because this admirable married woman was there; but in the midst of so much admiration what had become of his fine old power to conclude? This was the conduct of a man not judging but drifting, and he had pretended never to drift. If she were as unhappy as he believed the active sympathy of such a man would help her very little more than his indifference; if she were less so she needed no help and could dispense with his professions. He was sure moreover that if she knew he was staying on her account she would be extremely annoyed. This very feeling indeed had much to do with making it hard to go; her displeasure would be the flush on the snow of the high cold stoicism that touched him to the heart. At moments withal he assured himself that staying to watch her — and what else did it come to? — was simply impertinent; it was gross to keep tugging at the cover of a book so intentionally closed. Then inclination answered that some day her self-support would fail, and he had a vision of this exquisite creature calling vainly for help. He would just be her friend to any length,

and it was unworthy of either to think about consequences. He was a friend, however, who nursed a brooding regret for his not having known her five years earlier, as well as a particular objection to those who had smartly anticipated him. It seemed one of fortune's most mocking strokes that she should be surrounded by persons whose only merit was that they threw every side of her, as she turned in her pain, into radiant relief.

Our young man's growing irritation made it more and more difficult for him to see any other merit than this in Richard de Mauves. And yet, disinterestedly, it would have been hard to give a name to the pitiless perversity lighted by such a conclusion, and there were times when Longmore was almost persuaded against his finer judgement that he was really the most considerate of husbands and that it was not a man's fault if his wife's love of life had pitched itself once for all in the minor key. The Count's manners were perfect, his discretion irreproachable, and he seemed never to address his companion but, sentimentally speaking, hat in hand. His tone to Longmore — as the latter was perfectly aware — was that of a man of the world to a man not quite of the world; but what it lacked in true frankness it made up in easy form. "I can't thank you enough for having overcome my wife's shyness," he more than once declared. "If we left her to do as she pleased she would — in her youth and her beauty — bury herself all absurdly alive. Come often, and bring your good friends and compatriots — some of them are so amusing. She'll have nothing to do with mine,

but perhaps you'll be able to offer her better *son affaire*."

M. de Mauves made these speeches with a bright assurance very amazing to our hero, who had an innocent belief that a man's head may point out to him the shortcomings of his heart and make him ashamed of them. He could n't fancy him formed both to neglect his wife and to take the derisive view of her minding it. Longmore had at any rate an exasperated sense that this nobleman thought rather the less of their interesting friend on account of that very same fine difference of nature which so deeply stirred his own sympathies. He was rarely present during the sessions of the American visitor, and he made a daily journey to Paris, where he had *de gros soucis d'affaires* as he once mentioned — with an all-embracing flourish and not in the least in the tone of apology. When he appeared it was late in the evening and with an imperturbable air of being on the best of terms with every one and every thing which was peculiarly annoying if you happened to have a tacit quarrel with him. If he was an honest man he was an honest man somehow spoiled for confidence. Something he had, however, that his critic vaguely envied, something in his address, splendidly positive, a manner rounded and polished by the habit of conversation and the friction of full experience, an urbanity exercised for his own sake, not for his neighbour's, which seemed the fruit of one of those strong temperaments that rule the inward scene better than the best conscience. The Count had plainly no sense for morals, and poor Longmore, who had the finest,

would have been glad to borrow his recipe for appearing then so to range the whole scale of the senses. What was it that enabled him, short of being a monster with visibly cloven feet and exhaling brimstone, to misprize so cruelly a nature like his wife's and to walk about the world with such a handsome invincible grin? It was the essential grossness of his imagination, which had nevertheless helped him to such a store of neat speeches. He could be highly polite and could doubtless be damnably impertinent, but the life of the spirit was a world as closed to him as the world of great music to a man without an ear. It was ten to one he did n't in the least understand how his wife felt; he and his smooth sister had doubtless agreed to regard their relative as a Puritanical little person, of meagre aspirations and few talents, content with looking at Paris from the terrace and, as a special treat, having a countryman very much like herself to regale her with innocent echoes of their native wit. M. de Mauves was tired of his companion; he liked women who could, frankly, amuse him better. She was too dim, too delicate, too modest; she had too few arts, too little coquetry, too much charity. Lighting a cigar some day while he summed up his situation, her husband had probably decided she was incurably stupid. It was the same taste, in essence, our young man moralised, as the taste for M. Gérôme and M. Baudry in painting and for M. Gustave Flaubert and M. Charles Baudelaire in literature. The Count was a pagan and his wife a Christian, and between them an impassable gulf. He was by race and instinct a *grand seigneur*. Longmore had often heard

of that historic type, and was properly grateful for an opportunity to examine it closely. It had its elegance of outline, but depended on spiritual sources so remote from those of which he felt the living gush in his own soul that he found himself gazing at it, in irreconcileable antipathy, through a dim historic mist. "I'm a modern bourgeois," he said, "and not perhaps so good a judge of how far a pretty woman's tongue may go at supper before the mirrors properly crack to hear. But I've not met one of the rarest of women without recognising her, without making my reflexion that, charm for charm, such a *manière d'être* is more 'fetching' even than the worst of Thérésa's songs sung by a dissipated duchess. Wit for wit, I think mine carries me further." It was easy indeed to perceive that, as became a *grand seigneur*, M. de Mauves had a stock of social principles. He would n't especially have desired perhaps that his wife should compete in amateur operettas with the duchesses in question, for the most part of comparatively recent origin; but he held that a gentleman may take his amusement where he finds it, that he is quite at liberty not to find it at home, and that even an adoptive daughter of his house who should hang her head and have red eyes and allow herself to make any other response to officious condolence than that her husband's amusements were his own affair, would have forfeited every claim to having her finger-tips bowed over and kissed. And yet in spite of this definite faith Longmore figured him much inconvenienced by the Countess's avoidance of betrayals. Did it dimly occur to him that the principle of this reserve was

self-control and not self-effacement? She was a model to all the inferior matrons of his line, past and to come, and an occasional "scene" from her at a manageable hour would have had something reassuring — would have attested her stupidity rather better than this mere polish of her patience.

Longmore would have given much to be able to guess how this latter secret worked, and he tried more than once, though timidly and awkwardly enough, to make out the game she was playing. She struck him as having long resisted the force of cruel evidence, and, as though succumbing to it at last, having denied herself on simple grounds of generosity the right to complain. Her faith might have perished, but the sense of her own old deep perversity remained. He believed her thus quite capable of reproaching herself with having expected too much and of trying to persuade herself out of her bitterness by saying that her hopes had been vanities and follies and that what was before her was simply Life. "I hate tragedy," she once said to him; "I'm a dreadful coward about having to suffer or to bleed. I've always tried to believe that — without base concessions — such extremities may always somehow be dodged or indefinitely postponed. I should be willing to buy myself off, from having ever to be *overwhelmed*, by giving up — well, any amusement you like." She lived evidently in nervous apprehension of being fatally convinced — of seeing to the end of her deception. Longmore, when he thought of this, felt the force of his desire to offer her something of which she could be as sure as of the sun in heaven.

IV

His friend Webster meanwhile lost no time in accusing him of the basest infidelity and in asking him what he found at suburban Saint-Germain to prefer to Van Eyck and Memling, Rubens and Rembrandt. A day or two after the receipt of this friend's letter he took a walk with Madame de Mauves in the forest. They sat down on a fallen log and she began to arrange into a bouquet the anemones and violets she had gathered. "I've a word here," he said at last, "from a friend whom I some time ago promised to join in Brussels. The time has come — it has passed. It finds me terribly unwilling to leave Saint-Germain."

She looked up with the immediate interest she always showed in his affairs, but with no hint of a disposition to make a personal application of his words. "Saint-Germain is pleasant enough, but are you doing yourself justice? Shan't you regret in future days that instead of travelling and seeing cities and monuments and museums and improving your mind you simply sat here — for instance — on a log and pulled my flowers to pieces?"

"What I shall regret in future days," he answered after some hesitation, "is that I should have sat here — sat here so much — and never have shown what's the matter with me. I'm fond of museums and monuments and of improving my mind, and I'm particularly

fond of my friend Webster. But I can't bring myself to leave Saint-Germain without asking you a question. You must forgive me if it's indiscreet and be assured that curiosity was never more respectful. Are you really as unhappy as I imagine you to be?"

She had evidently not expected his appeal, and, making her change colour, it took her unprepared. "If I strike you as unhappy," she none the less simply said, "I've been a poorer friend to you than I wished to be."

"I, perhaps, have been a better friend of yours than you've supposed," he returned. "I've admired your reserve, your courage, your studied gaiety. But I've felt the existence of something beneath them that was more *you* — more you as I wished to know you — than they were; some trouble in you that I've permitted myself to hate and resent."

She listened all gravely, but without an air of offence, and he felt that while he had been timorously calculating the last consequences of friendship she had quietly enough accepted them. "You surprise me," she said slowly, and her flush still lingered. "But to refuse to answer you would confirm some impression in you even now much too strong. Any 'trouble' — if you mean any unhappiness — that one can sit comfortably talking about is an unhappiness with distinct limitations. If I were examined before a board of commissioners for testing the felicity of mankind I'm sure I should be pronounced a very fortunate woman." There was something that deeply touched him in her tone, and this quality pierced further as she continued. "But let me add, with all

gratitude for your sympathy, that it's my own affair altogether. It need n't disturb you, my dear sir," she wound up with a certain quaintness of gaiety, "for I've often found myself in your company contented enough and diverted enough."

"Well, you're a wonderful woman," the young man declared, "and I admire you as I've never admired any one. You're wiser than anything I, for one, can say to you; and what I ask of you is not to let me advise or console you, but simply thank you for letting me know you." He had intended no such outburst as this, but his voice rang loud and he felt an unfamiliar joy as he uttered it.

She shook her head with some impatience. "Let us be friends — as I supposed we were going to be — without protestations and fine words. To have you paying compliments to my wisdom — that would be real wretchedness. I can dispense with your admiration better than the Flemish painters can — better than Van Eyck and Rubens, in spite of all their worshippers. Go join your friend — see everything, enjoy everything, learn everything, and write me an excellent letter, brimming over with your impressions. I'm extremely fond of the Dutch painters," she added with the faintest quaver in the world, an impressible break of voice that Longmore had noticed once or twice before and had interpreted as the sudden weariness, the controlled convulsion, of a spirit self-condemned to play a part.

"I don't believe you care a button for the Dutch painters," he said with a laugh. "But I shall certainly write you a letter."

She rose and turned homeward, thoughtfully rearranging her flowers as she walked. Little was said; Longmore was asking himself with an agitation of his own in the unspoken words whether all this meant simply that he was in love. He looked at the rooks wheeling against the golden-hued sky, between the tree-tops, but not at his companion, whose personal presence seemed lost in the felicity she had created. Madame de Mauves was silent and grave —she felt she had almost grossly failed and she was proportionately disappointed. An emotional friendship she had not desired; her scheme had been to pass with her visitor as a placid creature with a good deal of leisure which she was disposed to devote to profitable conversation of an impersonal sort. She liked him extremely, she felt in him the living force of something to which, when she made up her girlish mind that a needy nobleman was the ripest fruit of time, she had done too scant justice. They went through the little gate in the garden-wall and approached the house. On the terrace Madame Clairin was entertaining a friend— a little elderly gentleman with a white moustache and an order in his buttonhole. Madame de Mauves chose to pass round the house into the court; whereupon her sister-in-law, greeting Longmore with an authoritative nod, lifted her eye-glass and stared at them as they went by. Longmore heard the little old gentleman uttering some old-fashioned epigram about "la vieille galanterie française" — then by a sudden impulse he looked at Madame de Mauves and wondered what she was doing in such a world. She stopped before

the house, not asking him to come in. "I hope you'll act on my advice and waste no more time at Saint-Germain."

For an instant there rose to his lips some faded compliment about his time not being wasted, but it expired before the simple sincerity of her look. She stood there as gently serious as the angel of disinterestedness, and it seemed to him he should insult her by treating her words as a bait for flattery. "I shall start in a day or two," he answered, "but I won't promise you not to come back."

"I hope not," she said simply. "I expect to be here a long time."

"I shall come and say good-bye," he returned — which she appeared to accept with a smile as she went in.

He stood a moment, then walked slowly homeward by the terrace. It seemed to him that to leave her thus, for a gain on which she herself insisted, was to know her better and admire her more. But he was aware of a vague ferment of feeling which her evasion of his question half an hour before had done more to deepen than to allay. In the midst of it suddenly, on the great terrace of the Château, he encountered M. de Mauves, planted there against the parapet and finishing a cigar. The Count, who, he thought he made out, had an air of peculiar affability, offered him his white plump hand. Longmore stopped; he felt a sharp, a sore desire to cry out to him that he had the most precious wife in the world, that he ought to be ashamed of himself not to know it, and that for all his grand assurance he had never looked

down into the depths of her eyes. Richard de Mauves, we have seen, considered he had; but there was doubtless now something in this young woman's eyes that had not been there five years before. The two men conversed formally enough, and M. de Mauves threw off a light bright remark or two about his visit to America. His tone was not soothing to Longmore's excited sensibilities. He seemed to have found the country a gigantic joke, and his blandness went but so far as to allow that jokes on that scale are indeed inexhaustible. Longmore was not by habit an aggressive apologist for the seat of his origin, but the Count's easy diagnosis confirmed his worst estimate of French superficiality. He had understood nothing, felt nothing, learned nothing, and his critic, glancing askance at his aristocratic profile, declared that if the chief merit of a long pedigree was to leave one so fatuously stupid he thanked goodness the Longmores had emerged from obscurity in the present century and in the person of an enterprising timber-merchant. M. de Mauves dwelt of course on that prime oddity of the American order — the liberty allowed the fairer half of the unmarried young, and confessed to some personal study of the "occasions" it offered to the speculative visitor; a line of research in which, during a fortnight's stay, he had clearly spent his most agreeable hours. "I'm bound to admit," he said, "that in every case I was disarmed by the extreme candour of the young lady, and that they took care of themselves to better purpose than I have seen some mammas in France take care of them." Longmore greeted this handsome con-

cession with the grimmest of smiles and damned his impertinent patronage.

Mentioning, however, at last that he was about to leave Saint-Germain, he was surprised, without exactly being flattered, by his interlocutor's quickened attention. "I'm so very sorry; I hoped we had you for the whole summer." Longmore murmured something civil and wondered why M. de Mauves should care whether he stayed or went. "You've been a real resource to Madame de Mauves," the Count added; "I assure you I've mentally blessed your visits."

"They were a great pleasure to me," Longmore said gravely. "Some day I expect to come back."

"Pray do" — and the Count made a great and friendly point of it. "You see the confidence I have in you." Longmore said nothing and M. de Mauves puffed his cigar reflectively and watched the smoke. "Madame de Mauves," he said at last, "is a rather singular person." And then while our young man shifted his position and wondered whether he was going to "explain" Madame de Mauves, "Being, as you are, her fellow countryman," this lady's husband pursued, "I don't mind speaking frankly. She's a little overstrained; the most charming woman in the world, as you see, but a little *volontaire* and morbid. Now you see she has taken this extraordinary fancy for solitude. I can't get her to go anywhere, to see any one. When my friends present themselves she's perfectly polite, but it cures them of coming again. She does n't do herself justice, and I expect every day to hear two or three of them say to me, 'Your wife's *jolie à croquer:* what a pity she

has n't a little *esprit.*' You must have found out that she has really a great deal. But, to tell the whole truth, what she needs is to forget herself. She sits alone for hours poring over her English books and looking at life through that terrible brown fog they seem to me — don't they? — to fling over the world. I doubt if your English authors," the Count went on with a serenity which Longmore afterwards characterised as sublime, "are very sound reading for young married women. I don't pretend to know much about them; but I remember that not long after our marriage Madame de Mauves undertook to read me one day some passages from a certain Wordsworth — a poet highly esteemed, it appears, *chez vous.* It was as if she had taken me by the nape of the neck and held my head for half an hour over a basin of *soupe aux choux:* I felt as if we ought to ventilate the drawing-room before any one called. But I suppose you know him — *ce génie-là.* Every nation has its own ideals of every kind, but when I remember some of *our* charming writers! I think at all events my wife never forgave me and that it was a real shock to her to find she had married a man who had very much the same taste in literature as in cookery. But you're a man of general culture, a man of the world," said M. de Mauves, turning to Longmore but looking hard at the seal of his watchguard. "You can talk about everything, and I'm sure you like Alfred de Musset as well as Monsieur Wordsworth. Talk to her about everything you can, Alfred de Musset included. Bah! I forgot you're going. Come back then as soon as possible and report on your travels. If my wife

too would make a little voyage it would do her great good. It would enlarge her horizon" — and M. de Mauves made a series of short nervous jerks with his stick in the air — "it would wake up her imagination. She's too much of one piece, you know — it would show her how much one may bend without breaking." He paused a moment and gave two or three vigorous puffs. Then turning to his companion again with eyebrows expressively raised: "I hope you admire my candour. I beg you to believe I would n't say such things to one of *us!*"

Evening was at hand and the lingering light seemed to charge the air with faintly golden motes. Longmore stood gazing at these luminous particles; he could almost have fancied them a swarm of humming insects, the chorus of a refrain: "She has a great deal of *esprit* — she has a great deal of *esprit.*" "Yes, she has a great deal," he said mechanically, turning to the Count. M. de Mauves glanced at him sharply, as if to ask what the deuce he was talking about. "She has a great deal of intelligence," said Longmore quietly, "a great deal of beauty, a great many virtues."

M. de Mauves busied himself for a moment in lighting another cigar, and when he had finished, with a return of his confidential smile, "I suspect you of thinking that I don't do my wife justice," he made answer. "Take care — take care, young man; that's a dangerous assumption. In general a man always does his wife justice. More than justice," the Count laughed — "that we keep for the wives of other men!"

Longmore afterwards remembered in favour of his friend's fine manner that he had not measured at this moment the dusky abyss over which it hovered. But a deepening subterranean echo, loudest at the last, lingered on his spiritual ear. For the present his keenest sensation was a desire to get away and cry aloud that M. de Mauves was no better than a pompous dunce. He bade him an abrupt good-night, which was to serve also, he said, as good-bye.

"Decidedly then you go?" It was spoken almost with the note of irritation.

"Decidedly."

"But of course you 'll come and take leave —?" His manner implied that the omission would be uncivil, but there seemed to Longmore himself something so ludicrous in his taking a lesson in consideration from M. de Mauves that he put the appeal by with a laugh. The Count frowned as if it were a new and unpleasant sensation for him to be left at a loss. "Ah you people have your *façons!*" he murmured as Longmore turned away, not foreseeing that he should learn still more about his *façons* before he had done with him.

Longmore sat down to dinner at his hotel with his usual good intentions, but in the act of lifting his first glass of wine to his lips he suddenly fell to musing and set down the liquor untasted. This mood lasted long, and when he emerged from it his fish was cold; but that mattered little, for his appetite was gone. That evening he packed his trunk with an indignant energy. This was so effective that the operation was accomplished before bedtime, and as he was not in the

least sleepy he devoted the interval to writing two letters, one of them a short note to Madame de Mauves, which he entrusted to a servant for delivery the next morning. He had found it best, he said, to leave Saint-Germain immediately, but he expected to return to Paris early in the autumn. The other letter was the result of his having remembered a day or two before that he had not yet complied with Mrs. Draper's injunction to give her an account of his impression of her friend. The present occasion seemed propitious, and he wrote half a dozen pages. His tone, however, was grave, and Mrs. Draper, on reading him over, was slightly disappointed — she would have preferred he should have "raved" a little more. But what chiefly concerns us is the concluding passage.

"The only time she ever spoke to me of her marriage," he wrote, "she intimated that it had been a perfect love-match. With all abatements, I suppose, this is what most marriages take themselves to be; but it would mean in her case, I think, more than in that of most women, for her love was an absolute idealisation. She believed her husband to be a hero of rose-coloured romance, and he turns out to be not even a hero of very sad-coloured reality. For some time now she has been sounding her mistake, but I don't believe she has yet touched the bottom. She strikes me as a person who 's begging off from full knowledge — who has patched up a peace with some painful truth and is trying a while the experiment of living with closed eyes. In the dark she tries to see again the gilding on her idol. Illusion of course is

illusion, and one must always pay for it; but there's something truly tragical in seeing an earthly penalty levied on such divine folly as this. As for M. de Mauves he's a shallow Frenchman to his fingers' ends, and I confess I should dislike him for this if he were a much better man. He can't forgive his wife for having married him too extravagantly and loved him too well; since he feels, I suppose, in some uncorrupted corner of his being that as she originally saw him so he ought to have been. It disagrees with him somewhere that a little American bourgeoise should have fancied him a finer fellow than he is or than he at all wants to be. He has n't a glimmering of real acquaintance with his wife; he can't understand the stream of passion flowing so clear and still. To tell the truth I hardly understand it myself, but when I see the sight I find I greatly admire it. The Count at any rate would have enjoyed the comfort of believing his wife as bad a case as himself, and you'll hardly believe me when I assure you he goes about intimating to gentlemen whom he thinks it may concern that it would be a convenience to him they should make love to Madame de Mauves."

V

On reaching Paris Longmore straightway purchased a Murray's "Belgium," to help himself to believe that he would start on the morrow for Brussels; but when the morrow came it occurred to him that he ought by way of preparation to acquaint himself more intimately with the Flemish painters in the Louvre. This took a whole morning, but it did little to hasten his departure. He had abruptly left Saint-Germain because it seemed to him that respect for Madame de Mauves required he should bequeath her husband no reason to suppose he had, as it were, taken a low hint; but now that he had deferred to that scruple he found himself thinking more and more ardently of his friend. It was a poor expression of ardour to be lingering irresolutely on the forsaken boulevard, but he detested the idea of leaving Saint-Germain five hundred miles behind him. He felt very foolish, nevertheless, and wandered about nervously, promising himself to take the next train. A dozen trains started, however, and he was still in Paris. This inward ache was more than he had bargained for, and as he looked at the shop-windows he wondered if it represented a "passion." He had never been fond of the word and had grown up with much mistrust of what it stood for. He had hoped that when he should fall "really" in love he should do it with an excellent conscience, with plenty

of confidence and joy, doubtless, but no strange soreness, no pangs nor regrets. Here was a sentiment concocted of pity and anger as well as of admiration, and bristling with scruples and doubts and fears. He had come abroad to enjoy the Flemish painters and all others, but what fair-tressed saint of Van Eyck or Memling was so interesting a figure as the lonely lady of Saint-Germain? His restless steps carried him at last out of the long villa-bordered avenue which leads to the Bois de Boulogne.

Summer had fairly begun and the drive beside the lake was empty, but there were various loungers on the benches and chairs, and the great café had an air of animation. Longmore's walk had given him an appetite, and he went into the establishment and demanded a dinner, remarking for the hundredth time, as he admired the smart little tables disposed in the open air, how much better (than anywhere else) they ordered this matter in France.

"Will monsieur dine in the garden or in the salon?" the waiter blandly asked. Longmore chose the garden and, observing that a great cluster of June roses was trained over the wall of the house, placed himself at a table near by, where the best of dinners was served him on the whitest of linen and in the most shining of porcelain. It so happened that his table was near a window and that as he sat he could look into a corner of the salon. So it was that his attention rested on a lady seated just within the window, which was open, face to face apparently with a companion who was concealed by the curtain. She was a very pretty woman, and Longmore looked at her as

often as was consistent with good manners. After a while he even began to wonder who she was and finally to suspect that she was one of those ladies whom it is no breach of good manners to look at as often as you like. Our young man too, if he had been so disposed, would have been the more free to give her all his attention that her own was fixed upon the person facing her. She was what the French call a *belle brune*, and though Longmore, who had rather a conservative taste in such matters, was but half-charmed by her bold outlines and even braver complexion, he could n't help admiring her expression of basking contentment.

She was evidently very happy, and her happiness gave her an air of innocence. The talk of her friend, whoever he was, abundantly suited her humour, for she sat listening to him with a broad idle smile and interrupting him fitfully, while she crunched her bonbons, with a murmured response, presumably as broad, which appeared to have the effect of launching him again. She drank a great deal of champagne and ate an immense number of strawberries, and was plainly altogether a person with an impartial relish for strawberries, champagne and what she doubtless would have called *bêtises*.

They had half-finished dinner when Longmore sat down, and he was still in his place when they rose. She had hung her bonnet on a nail above her chair, and her companion passed round the table to take it down for her. As he did so she bent her head to look at a wine-stain on her dress, and in the movement exposed the greater part of the back of a very

handsome neck. The gentleman observed it, and observed also, apparently, that the room beyond them was empty; that he stood within eyeshot of Longmore he failed to observe. He stooped suddenly and imprinted a gallant kiss on the fair expanse. In the author of this tribute Longmore then recognised Richard de Mauves. The lady to whom it had been rendered put on her bonnet, using his flushed smile as a mirror, and in a moment they passed through the garden on their way to their carriage. Then for the first time M. de Mauves became aware of his wife's young friend. He measured with a rapid glance this spectator's relation to the open window and checked himself in the impulse to stop and speak to him. He contented himself with bowing all imperturbably as he opened the gate for his companion.

That evening Longmore made a railway journey, but not to Brussels. He had effectually ceased to care for Brussels; all he cared for in the world now was Madame de Mauves. The air of his mind had had a sudden clearing-up; pity and anger were still throbbing there, but they had space to range at their pleasure, for doubts and scruples had abruptly departed. It was little, he felt, that he could interpose between her resignation and the indignity of her position; but that little, if it involved the sacrifice of everything that bound him to the tranquil past, he could offer her with a rapture which at last made stiff resistance a terribly inferior substitute for faith. Nothing in his tranquil past had given such a zest to consciousness as this happy sense of choosing to go

straight back to Saint-Germain. How to justify his return, how to explain his ardour, troubled him little. He was n't even sure he wished to be understood; he wished only to show how little by any fault of his Madame de Mauves was alone so with the harshness of fate. He was conscious of no distinct desire to "make love" to her; if he could have uttered the essence of his longing he would have said that he wished her to remember that in a world coloured grey to her vision by the sense of her mistake there was one vividly honest man. She might certainly have remembered it, however, without his coming back to remind her; and it is not to be denied that as he waited for the morrow he longed immensely for the sound of her voice.

He waited the next day till his usual hour of calling — the late afternoon; but he learned at the door that the mistress of the house was not at home. The servant offered the information that she was walking a little way in the forest. Longmore went through the garden and out of the small door into the lane, and, after half an hour's vain exploration, saw her coming toward him at the end of a green by-path. As he appeared she stopped a moment, as if to turn aside; then recognising him she slowly advanced and had presently taken the hand he held out.

"Nothing has happened," she said with her beautiful eyes on him. "You're not ill?"

"Nothing except that when I got to Paris I found how fond I had grown of Saint-Germain."

She neither smiled nor looked flattered; it seemed indeed to Longmore that she took his reappearance

with no pleasure. But he was uncertain, for he immediately noted that in his absence the whole character of her face had changed. It showed him something momentous had happened. It was no longer self-contained melancholy that he read in her eyes, but grief and agitation which had lately struggled with the passionate love of peace ruling her before all things else, and forced her to know that deep experience is never peaceful. She was pale and had evidently been shedding tears. He felt his heart beat hard — he seemed now to touch her secret. She continued to look at him with a clouded brow, as if his return had surrounded her with complications too great to be disguised by a colourless welcome. For some moments, as he turned and walked beside her, neither spoke; then abruptly, "Tell me truly, Mr. Longmore," she said, "why you've come back."

He inclined himself to her, almost pulling up again, with an air that startled her into a certainty of what she had feared. "Because I've learned the real answer to the question I asked you the other day. You're not happy — you're too good to be happy on the terms offered you. Madame de Mauves," he went on with a gesture which protested against a gesture of her own, "I can't be happy, you know, when you're as little so as I make you out. I don't care for anything so long as I only feel helpless and sore about you. I found during those dreary days in Paris that the thing in life I most care for is this daily privilege of seeing you. I know it's very brutal to tell you I admire you; it's an insult to you to treat you as if you had complained to me or appealed to me. But such

a friendship as I waked up to there" — and he tossed his head toward the distant city — "is a potent force, I assure you. When forces are stupidly stifled they explode. However," he went on, "if you had told me every trouble in your heart it would have mattered little; I could n't say more than I *must* say now — that if that in life from which you 've hoped most has given you least, this devoted respect of mine will refuse no service and betray no trust."

She had begun to make marks in the earth with the point of her parasol, but she stopped and listened to him in perfect immobility — immobility save for the appearance by the time he had stopped speaking of a flush in her guarded clearness. Such as it was it told Longmore she was moved, and his first perceiving it was the happiest moment of his life. She raised her eyes at last, and they uttered a plea for non-insistence that unspeakably touched him.

"Thank you — thank you!" she said calmly enough; but the next moment her own emotion baffled this pretence, a convulsion shook her for ten seconds and she burst into tears. Her tears vanished as quickly as they came, but they did Longmore a world of good. He had always felt indefinably afraid of her; her being had somehow seemed fed by a deeper faith and a stronger will than his own; but her half-dozen smothered sobs showed him the bottom of her heart and convinced him she was weak enough to be grateful. "Excuse me," she said; "I 'm too nervous to listen to you. I believe I could have dealt with an enemy to-day, but I can't bear up under a friend."

"You're killing yourself with stoicism — that's what is the matter with you!" he cried. "Listen to a friend for his own sake if not for yours. I've never presumed to offer you an atom of compassion, and you can't accuse yourself of an abuse of charity."

She looked about her as under the constraint of this appeal, but it promised him a reluctant attention. Noting, however, by the wayside the fallen log on which they had rested a few evenings before, she went and sat down on it with a resigned grace while the young man, silent before her and watching her, took from her the mute assurance that if she was charitable now he must at least be very wise.

"Something came to my knowledge yesterday," he said as he sat down beside her, "which gave me an intense impression of your loneliness. You're truth itself, and there's no truth about you. You believe in purity and duty and dignity, and you live in a world in which they're daily belied. I ask myself with vain rage how you ever came into such a world, and why the perversity of fate never let me know you before."

She waited a little; she looked down, straight before her. "I like my 'world' no better than you do, and it was not for its own sake I came into it. But what particular group of people is worth pinning one's faith upon? I confess it sometimes seems to me men and women are very poor creatures. I suppose I'm too romantic and always was. I've an unfortunate taste for poetic fitness. Life's hard prose, and one must learn to read prose contentedly. I believe I once supposed all the prose to be in America, which was

very foolish. What I thought, what I believed, what I expected, when I was an ignorant girl fatally addicted to falling in love with my own theories, is more than I can begin to tell you now. Sometimes when I remember certain impulses, certain illusions of those days they take away my breath, and I wonder that my false point of view has n't led me into troubles greater than any I've now to lament. I had a conviction which you 'd probably smile at if I were to attempt to express it to you. It was a singular form for passionate faith to take, but it had all of the sweetness and the ardour of passionate faith. It led me to take a great step, and it lies behind me now, far off, a vague deceptive form melting in the light of experience. It has faded, but it has n't vanished. Some feelings, I 'm sure, die only with ourselves; some illusions are as much the condition of our life as our heart-beats. They say that life itself is an illusion — that this world is a shadow of which the reality is yet to come. Life is all of a piece then and there 's no shame in being miserably human. As for my loneliness, it does n't greatly matter; it is the fault in part of my obstinacy. There have been times when I've been frantically distressed and, to tell you the truth, wretchedly homesick, because my maid — a jewel of a maid — lied to me with every second breath. There have been moments when I've wished I was the daughter of a poor New England minister — living in a little white house under a couple of elms and doing all the housework."

She had begun to speak slowly, with reserve and effort; but she went on quickly and as if talk were at

last a relief. "My marriage introduced me to people and things which seemed to me at first very strange and then very horrible, and then, to tell the truth, of very little importance. At first I expended a great deal of sorrow and dismay and pity on it all; but there soon came a time when I began to wonder if it were worth one's tears. If I could tell you the eternal friendships I've seen broken, the inconsolable woes consoled, the jealousies and vanities scrambling to outdo each other, you'd agree with me that tempers like yours and mine can understand neither such troubles nor such compensations. A year ago, while I was in the country, a friend of mine was in despair at the infidelity of her husband; she wrote me a most dolorous letter, and on my return to Paris I went immediately to see her. A week had elapsed, and as I had seen stranger things I thought she might have recovered her spirits. Not at all; she was still in despair — but at what? At the conduct, the abandoned, shameless conduct of — well of a lady I'll call Madame de T. You'll imagine of course that Madame de T. was the lady whom my friend's husband preferred to his wife. Far from it; he had never seen her. Who then was Madame de T.? Madame de T. was cruelly devoted to M. de V. And who was M. de V.? M. de V. was — well, in two words again, my friend was cultivating two jealousies at once. I hardly know what I said to her; something at any rate that she found unpardonable, for she quite gave me up. Shortly afterwards my husband proposed we should cease to live in Paris, and I gladly assented, for I believe I had taken a turn of spirits

that made me a detestable companion. I should have preferred to go quite into the country, into Auvergne, where my husband has a house. But to him Paris in some degree is necessary, and Saint-Germain has been a conscious compromise."

"A conscious compromise!" Longmore expressively repeated. "That's your whole life."

"It's the life of many people," she made prompt answer — "of most people of quiet tastes, and it's certainly better than acute distress. One's at a loss theoretically to defend compromises; but if I found a poor creature who had managed to arrive at one I should think myself not urgently called to expose its weak side." But she had no sooner uttered these words than she laughed all amicably, as if to mitigate their too personal application.

"Heaven forbid one should do that unless one has something better to offer," Longmore returned. "And yet I'm haunted by the dream of a life in which you should have found no compromises, for they're a perversion of natures that tend only to goodness and rectitude. As I see it you should have found happiness serene, profound, complete; a *femme de chambre* not a jewel perhaps, but warranted to tell but one fib a day; a society possibly rather provincial, but — in spite of your poor opinion of mankind — a good deal of solid virtue; jealousies and vanities very tame, and no particular iniquities and adulteries. A husband," he added after a moment — "a husband of your own faith and race and spiritual substance, who would have loved you well."

She rose to her feet, shaking her head. "You're

very kind to go to the expense of such dazzling visions for me. Visions are vain things; we must make the best of the reality we happen to be in for."

"And yet," said Longmore, provoked by what seemed the very wantonness of her patience, "the reality *you* 'happen to be in for' has, if I'm not in error, very recently taken a shape that keenly tests your philosophy."

She seemed on the point of replying that his sympathy was too zealous; but a couple of impatient tears in his eyes proved it founded on a devotion of which she might n't make light. "Ah philosophy?" she echoed. "I *have* none. Thank heaven," she cried with vehemence, "I have none! I believe, Mr. Longmore," she added in a moment, "that I 've nothing on earth but a conscience — it's a good time to tell you so — nothing but a dogged obstinate clinging conscience. Does that prove me to be indeed of your faith and race, and have you one yourself for which you can say as much? I don't speak in vanity, for I believe that if my conscience may prevent me from doing anything very base it will effectually prevent me also from doing anything very fine."

"I'm delighted to hear it," her friend returned with high emphasis — "that proves we're made for each other. It's very certain I too shall never cut a great romantic figure. And yet I've fancied that in my case the unaccommodating organ we speak of might be blinded and gagged a while, in a really good cause, if not turned out of doors. In yours," he went on with the same appealing irony, "is it absolutely beyond being 'squared'?"

But she made no concession to his tone. "Don't laugh at your conscience," she answered gravely; "that's the only blasphemy I know."

She had hardly spoken when she turned suddenly at an unexpected sound, and at the same moment he heard a footstep in an adjacent by-path which crossed their own at a short distance from where they stood.

"It's M. de Mauves," she said at once; with which she moved slowly forward. Longmore, wondering how she knew without seeing, had overtaken her by the time her husband came into view. A solitary walk in the forest was a pastime to which M. de Mauves was not addicted, but he seemed on this occasion to have resorted to it with some equanimity. He was smoking a fragrant cigar and had thrust his thumb into the armhole of his waistcoat with the air of a man thinking at his ease. He stopped short with surprise on seeing his wife and her companion, and his surprise had for Longmore even the pitch of impertinence. He glanced rapidly from one to the other, fixed the young man's own look sharply a single instant and then lifted his hat with formal politeness.

"I was not aware," he said, turning to Madame de Mauves, "that I might congratulate you on the return of monsieur."

"You should at once have known it," she immediately answered, "if I had expected such a pleasure."

She had turned very pale, and Longmore felt this to be a first meeting after some commotion. "My

return was unexpected to myself," he said to her husband. "I came back last night."

M. de Mauves seemed to express such satisfaction as could consort with a limited interest. "It 's needless for me to make you welcome. Madame de Mauves knows the duties of hospitality." And with another bow he continued his walk.

She pursued her homeward course with her friend, neither of them pretending much not to consent to appear silent. The Count's few moments with them had both chilled Longmore and angered him, casting a shadow across a prospect which had somehow, just before, begun to open and almost to brighten. He watched his companion narrowly as they went, and wondered what she had last had to suffer. Her husband's presence had checked her disposition to talk, though nothing betrayed she had recognised his making a point at her expense. Yet if matters were none the less plainly at a crisis between them he could but wonder vainly what it was on her part that prevented some practical protest or some rupture. What did she suspect? — how much did she know? To what was she resigned? — how much had she forgiven? How, above all, did she reconcile with knowledge, or with suspicion, that intense consideration she had just now all but assured him she entertained? "She has loved him once," Longmore said with a sinking of the heart, "and with her to love once is to commit herself for ever. Her clever husband thinks her too prim. What would a stupid poet call it?" He relapsed with aching impotence into the sense of her being somehow beyond him,

unattainable, immeasurable by his own fretful logic. Suddenly he gave three passionate switches in the air with his cane which made Madame de Mauves look round. She could hardly have guessed their signifying that where ambition was so vain the next best thing to it was the very ardour of hopelessness.

She found in her drawing-room the little elderly Frenchman, M. de Chalumeau, whom Longmore had observed a few days before on the terrace. On this occasion too Madame Clairin was entertaining him, but as her sister-in-law came in she surrendered her post and addressed herself to our hero. Longmore, at thirty, was still an ingenuous youth, and there was something in this lady's large assured attack that fairly intimidated him. He was doubtless not as reassured as he ought to have been at finding he had not absolutely forfeited her favour by his want of resource during their last interview, and a suspicion of her being prepared to approach him on another line completed his distress.

"So you've returned from Brussels by way of the forest?" she archly asked.

"I've not been to Brussels. I returned yesterday from Paris by the only way — by the train."

Madame Clairin was infinitely struck. "I've never known a person at all *expérimentée* to be so fond of Saint-Germain. They generally declare it's horribly dull."

"That's not very polite to you," said Longmore, vexed at his lack of superior form and determined not to be abashed.

"Ah what have I to do with it?" Madame Clairin

brightly wailed. "I 'm the dullest thing here. They've not had, other gentlemen, your success with my sister-in-law."

"It would have been very easy to have it. Madame de Mauves is kindness itself."

She swung open her great fan. "To her own countrymen!"

Longmore remained silent; he hated the tone of this conversation. The speaker looked at him a little and then took in their hostess, to whom M. de Chalumeau was serving up another epigram, which the charming creature received with a droop of the head and eyes that strayed through the window. "Don't pretend to tell me," Madame Clairin suddenly exhaled, "that you're not in love with that pretty woman."

"*Allons donc!*" cried Longmore in the most inspired French he had ever uttered. He rose the next minute and took a hasty farewell.

VI

He allowed several days to pass without going back; it was of a sublime suitability to appear not to regard his friend's frankness during their last interview as a general invitation. The sacrifice cost him a great effort, for hopeless passions are exactly not the most patient; and he had moreover a constant fear that if, as he believed, deep within the circle round which he could only hover, the hour of supreme explanations had come, the magic of her magnanimity might convert M. de Mauves. Vicious men, it was abundantly recorded, had been so converted as to be acceptable to God, and the something divine in this lady's composition would sanctify any means she should choose to employ. Her means, he kept repeating, were no business of his, and the essence of his admiration ought to be to allow her to do as she liked; but he felt as if he should turn away into a world out of which most of the joy had departed if she should like, after all, to see nothing more in his interest in her than might be repaid by mere current social coin.

When at last he went back he found to his vexation that he was to run the gauntlet of Madame Clairin's officious hospitality. It was one of the first mornings of perfect summer, and the drawing-room, through the open windows, was flooded with such a confusion of odours and bird-notes as might warrant the hope that Madame de Mauves would renew with him for

an hour or two the exploration of the forest. Her sister-in-law, however, whose hair was not yet dressed, emerged like a brassy discord in a maze of melody. At the same moment the servant returned with his mistress's regrets; she begged to be excused, she was indisposed and unable to see Mr. Longmore. The young man knew just how disappointed he looked and just what Madame Clairin thought of it, and this consciousness determined in him an attitude of almost aggressive frigidity. This was apparently what she desired. She wished to throw him off his balance and, if she was not mistaken, knew exactly how.

"Put down your hat, Mr. Longmore," she said, "and be polite for once. You were not at all polite the other day when I asked you that friendly question about the state of your heart."

"I *have* no heart — to talk about," he returned with as little grace.

"As well say you've none at all. I advise you to cultivate a little eloquence; you may have use for it. That was not an idle question of mine; I don't ask idle questions. For a couple of months now that you've been coming and going among us it seems to me you've had very few to answer of any sort."

"I've certainly been very well treated," he still dryly allowed.

His companion waited ever so little to bring out: "Have you never felt disposed to ask any?"

Her look, her tone, were so charged with insidious meanings as to make him feel that even to understand her would savour of dishonest complicity. "What is it you have to tell me?" he cried with a flushed frown.

Her own colour rose at the question. It's rather hard, when you come bearing yourself very much as the sibyl when she came to the Roman king, to be treated as something worse than a vulgar gossip. "I might tell you, monsieur," she returned, "that you've as bad a *ton* as any young man I ever met. Where have you lived — what are your ideas? A stupid one of my own — possibly! — has been to call your attention to a fact that it takes some delicacy to touch upon. You've noticed, I suppose, that my sister-in-law is n't the happiest woman in the world."

"Oh!" — Longmore made short work of it.

She seemed to measure his intelligence a little uncertainly. "You've formed, I suppose," she nevertheless continued, "your conception of the grounds of her discontent?"

"It has n't required much forming. The grounds — or at least a specimen or two of them — have simply stared me in the face."

Madame Clairin considered a moment with her eyes on him. "Yes — *ces choses-là se voient*. My brother, in a single word, has the deplorable habit of falling in love with other women. I don't judge him; I don't judge my sister-in-law. I only permit myself to say that in her position I would have managed otherwise. I'd either have kept my husband's affection or I'd have frankly done without it. But my sister's an odd compound; I don't profess to understand her. Therefore it is, in a measure, that I appeal to you, her fellow countryman. Of course you'll be surprised at my way of looking at the matter, and I admit that it's a way in use only among people whose

history — that of a race — has cultivated in them the sense for high political solutions." She paused and Longmore wondered where the history of her race was going to lead her. But she clearly saw her course. "There has never been a *galant homme* among us, I fear, who has not given his wife, even when she was very charming, the right to be jealous. We know our history for ages back, and the fact's established. It's not a very edifying one if you like, but it's something to have scandals with pedigrees — if you can't have them with attenuations. Our men have been Frenchmen of France, and their wives — I may say it — have been of no meaner blood. You may see all their portraits at our poor charming old house — every one of them an 'injured' beauty, but not one of them hanging her head. Not one of them ever had the bad taste to be jealous, and yet not one in a dozen ever consented to an indiscretion — allowed herself, I mean, to be talked about. *Voilà comme elles ont su s'arranger.* How they did it — go and look at the dusky faded canvases and pastels and ask. They were dear brave women of wit. When they had a headache they put on a little rouge and came to supper as usual, and when they had a heart-ache they touched up that quarter with just such another brush. These are great traditions and charming precedents, I hold, and it does n't seem to me fair that a little American bourgeoise should come in and pretend to alter them — all to hang her modern photograph and her obstinate little *air penché* in the gallery of our shrewd great-grandmothers. She should fall into line, she should keep up the tone. When she married my brother I

don't suppose she took him for a member of a *société de bonnes œuvres*. I don't say we 're right; who *is* right? But we are as history has made us, and if any one 's to change it had better be our charming, but not accommodating, friend." Again Madame Clairin paused, again she opened and closed her great modern fan, which clattered like the screen of a shop-window. "Let her keep up the tone!" she prodigiously repeated.

Longmore felt himself gape, but he gasped an "Ah!" to cover it.

Madame Clairin's dip into the family annals had apparently imparted an honest zeal to her indignation. "For a long time," she continued, "my *belle-sœur* has been taking the attitude of an injured woman, affecting a disgust with the world and shutting herself up to read free-thinking books. I 've never permitted myself, you may believe, the least observation on her conduct, but I can't accept it as the last word either of taste or of tact. When a woman with her prettiness lets her husband stray away she deserves no small part of her fate. I don't wish you to agree with me — on the contrary; but I call such a woman a pure noodle. She must have bored him to death. What has passed between them for many months need n't concern us; what provocation my sister has had — monstrous, if you wish — what ennui my brother has suffered. It 's enough that a week ago, just after you had ostensibly gone to Brussels, something happened to produce an explosion. She found a letter in his pocket, a photograph, a trinket, *que sais-je?* At any rate there was a grand scene. I did n't

listen at the keyhole, and I don't know what was said; but I've reason to believe that my poor brother was hauled over the coals as I fancy none of his ancestors have ever been — even by angry ladies who were n't their wives."

Longmore had leaned forward in silent attention with his elbows on his knees, and now, impulsively, he dropped his face into his hands. "Ah poor poor woman!"

"Voilà!" said Madame Clairin. "You pity her."

"Pity her?" cried Longmore, looking up with ardent eyes and forgetting the spirit of the story to which he had been treated in the miserable facts. "Don't you?"

"A little. But I'm not acting sentimentally — I'm acting scientifically. We've always been capable of ideas. I want to arrange things; to see my brother free to do as he chooses; to see his wife contented. Do you understand me?"

"Very well, I think," the young man said. "You're the most immoral person I've lately had the privilege of conversing with."

Madame Clairin took it calmly. "Possibly. When was ever a great peacemaker not immoral?"

"Ah no," Longmore protested. "You're too superficial to be a great peacemaker. You don't begin to know anything about Madame de Mauves."

She inclined her head to one side while her fine eyes kept her visitor in view; she mused a moment and then smiled as with a certain compassionate patience. "It's not in my interest to contradict you."

"It would be in your interest to learn, madam,"

he resolutely returned, "what honest men most admire in a woman — and to recognise it when you see it."

She was wonderful — she waited a moment. "So you *are* in love!" she then effectively brought out.

For a moment he thought of getting up, but he decided to stay. "I wonder if you'd understand me," he said at last, "if I were to tell you that I have for Madame de Mauves the most devoted and most respectful friendship?"

"You underrate my intelligence. But in that case you ought to exert your influence to put an end to these painful domestic scenes."

"Do you imagine she talks to me about her domestic scenes?" Longmore cried.

His companion stared. "Then your friendship is n't returned?" And as he but ambiguously threw up his hands, "Now, at least," she added, "she'll have something to tell you. I happen to know the upshot of my brother's last interview with his wife." Longmore rose to his feet as a protest against the indelicacy of the position into which he had been drawn; but all that made him tender made him curious, and she caught in his averted eyes an expression that prompted her to strike her blow. "My brother's absurdly entangled with a certain person in Paris; of course he ought not to be, but he would n't be my brother if he were n't. It was this irregular passion that dictated his words. 'Listen to me, madam,' he cried at last; 'let us live like people who understand life! It's unpleasant to be forced to say such things outright, but you've a way of bringing one down to the rudi-

ments. I'm faithless, I'm heartless, I'm brutal, I'm everything horrible — it's understood. Take your revenge, console yourself: you're too charming a woman to have anything to complain of. Here's a handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you. Listen to your poor compatriot and you'll find that virtue's none the less becoming for being good-natured. You'll see that it's not after all such a doleful world and that there's even an advantage in having the most impudent of husbands.'" Madame Clairin paused; Longmore had turned very pale. "You may believe it," she amazingly pursued; "the speech took place in my presence; things were done in order. And now, monsieur" — this with a wondrous strained grimace which he was too troubled at the moment to appreciate, but which he remembered later with a kind of awe — "we count on you!"

"Her husband said this to her face to face, as you say it to me now?" he asked after a silence.

"Word for word and with the most perfect politeness."

"And Madame de Mauves — what did she say?"

Madame Clairin smiled again. "To such a speech as that a woman says — nothing. She had been sitting with a piece of needlework, and I think she had n't seen Richard since their quarrel the day before. He came in with the gravity of an ambassador, and I'm sure that when he made his *demande en mariage* his manner was n't more respectful. He only wanted white gloves!" said Longmore's friend. "My *belle-sœur* sat silent a few moments, drawing her stitches, and then without a word, without a glance, walked

out of the room. It was just what she *should* have done!"

"Yes," the young man repeated, "it was just what she should have done."

"And I, left alone with my brother, do you know what I said?"

Longmore shook his head. "*Mauvais sujet!*" he suggested.

"'You've done me the honour,' I said, 'to take this step in my presence. I don't pretend to qualify it. You know what you're about, and it's your own affair. But you may confide in my discretion.' Do you think he has had reason to complain of it?" She received no answer; her visitor had slowly averted himself; he passed his gloves mechanically round the band of his hat. "I hope," she cried, "you're not going to start for Brussels!"

Plainly he was much disturbed, and Madame Clairin might congratulate herself on the success of her plea for old-fashioned manners. And yet there was something that left her more puzzled than satisfied in the colourless tone with which he answered, "No, I shall remain here for the present." The processes of his mind were unsociably private, and she could have fancied for a moment that he was linked with their difficult friend in some monstrous conspiracy of asceticism.

"Come this evening," she nevertheless bravely resumed. "The rest will take care of itself. Meanwhile I shall take the liberty of telling my sister-in-law that I've repeated — in short, that I've put you *au fait*."

He had a start but he controlled himself, speaking quietly enough. "Tell her what you please. Nothing you can tell her will affect her conduct."

"Voyons! Do you mean to tell me that a woman young, pretty, sentimental, neglected, wronged if you will — ? I see you don't believe it. Believe simply in your own opportunity!" she went on. "But for heaven's sake, if it is to lead anywhere, don't come back with that *visage de croquemort*. You look as if you were going to bury your heart — not to offer it to a pretty woman. You're much better when you smile — you're very nice then. Come, do yourself justice."

He remained a moment face to face with her, but his expression did n't change. "I shall do myself justice," he however after an instant made answer; and abruptly, with a bow, he took his departure.

VII

He felt, when he found himself unobserved and outside, that he must plunge into violent action, walk fast and far and defer the opportunity for thought. He strode away into the forest, swinging his cane, throwing back his head, casting his eyes into verdurous vistas and following the road without a purpose. He felt immensely excited, but could have given no straight name to his agitation. It was a joy as all increase of freedom is joyous; something seemed to have been cleared out of his path and his destiny to have rounded a cape and brought him into sight of an open sea. But it was a pain in the degree in which his freedom somehow resolved itself into the need of despising all mankind with a single exception; and the fact that Madame de Mauves inhabited a planet contaminated by the presence of the baser multitude kept elation from seeming a pledge of ideal bliss.

There she was, at any rate, and circumstances now forced them to be intimate. She had ceased to have what men call a secret for him, and this fact itself brought with it a sort of rapture. He had no prevision that he should "profit," in the vulgar sense, by the extraordinary position into which they had been thrown; it might be but a cruel trick of destiny to make hope a harsher mockery and renunciation a keener suffering. But above all this rose the conviction that she could do nothing that would n't quicken

his attachment. It was this conviction that gross accident — all odious in itself — would force the beauty of her character into more perfect relief for him that made him stride along as if he were celebrating a spiritual feast. He rambled at hazard for a couple of hours, finding at last that he had left the forest behind him and had wandered into an unfamiliar region. It was a perfectly rural scene, and the still summer day gave it a charm for which its meagre elements but half accounted.

He thought he had never seen anything so characteristically French; all the French novels seemed to have described it, all the French landscapists to have painted it. The fields and trees were of a cool metallic green; the grass looked as if it might stain his trousers and the foliage his hands. The clear light had a mild greyness, the sheen of silver, not of gold, was in the work-a-day sun. A great red-roofed high-stacked farmhouse, with whitewashed walls and a straggling yard, surveyed the highroad, on one side, from behind a transparent curtain of poplars. A narrow stream half-choked with emerald rushes and edged with grey aspens occupied the opposite quarter. The meadows rolled and sloped away gently to the low horizon, which was barely concealed by the continuous line of clipped and marshalled trees. The prospect was not rich, but had a frank homeliness that touched the young man's fancy. It was full of light atmosphere and diffused clearness, and if it was prosaic it was somehow sociable.

Longmore was disposed to walk further, and he advanced along the road beneath the poplars. In

twenty minutes he came to a village which straggled away to the right, among orchards and *potagers*. On the left, at a stone's throw from the road, stood a little pink-faced inn which reminded him that he had not breakfasted, having left home with a prevision of hospitality from Madame de Mauves. In the inn he found a brick-tiled parlour and a hostess in sabots and a white cap, whom, over the omelette she speedily served him — borrowing licence from the bottle of sound red wine that accompanied it — he assured she was a true artist. To reward his compliment she invited him to smoke his cigar in her little garden behind the house.

Here he found a *tonnelle* and a view of tinted crops stretching down to the stream. The *tonnelle* was rather close, and he preferred to lounge on a bench against the pink wall, in the sun, which was not too hot. Here, as he rested and gazed and mused, he fell into a train of thought which, in an indefinable fashion, was a soft influence from the scene about him. His heart, which had been beating fast for the past three hours, gradually checked its pulses and left him looking at life with rather a more level gaze. The friendly tavern sounds coming out through the open windows, the sunny stillness of the yellowing grain which covered so much vigorous natural life, conveyed no strained nor high-pitched message, had little to say about renunciation — nothing at all about spiritual zeal. They communicated the sense of plain ripe nature, expressed the unperverted reality of things, declared that the common lot is n't brilliantly amusing and that the part of wisdom is to grasp

frankly at experience lest you miss it altogether. What reason there was for his beginning to wonder after this whether a deeply-wounded heart might be soothed and healed by such a scene, it would be difficult to explain; certain it was that as he sat there he dreamt, awake, of an unhappy woman who strolled by the slow-flowing stream before him and who pulled down the fruit-laden boughs in the orchards. He mused and mused, and at last found himself quite angry that he could n't somehow think worse of Madame de Mauves — or at any rate think otherwise. He could fairly claim that in the romantic way he asked very little of life — made modest demands on passion: why then should his only passion be born to ill fortune? Why should his first — his last — glimpse of positive happiness be so indissolubly linked with renunciation?

It is perhaps because, like many spirits of the same stock, he had in his composition a lurking principle of sacrifice, sacrifice for sacrifice's sake, to the authority of which he had ever paid due deference, that he now felt all the vehemence of rebellion. To renounce, to renounce again, to renounce for ever, was this all that youth and longing and ardour were meant for? Was experience to be muffled and mutilated like an indecent picture? Was a man to sit and deliberately condemn his future to be the blank memory of a regret rather than the long possession of a treasure? Sacrifice? The word was a trap for minds muddled by fear, an ignoble refuge of weakness. To insist now seemed not to dare, but simply to *be*, to live on possible terms.

His hostess came out to hang a moist cloth on the

hedge, and, though her guest was sitting quietly enough, she might have imagined in his kindled eyes a flattering testimony to the quality of her wine. As she turned back into the house she was met by a young man of whom Longmore took note in spite of his high distraction. He was evidently a member of that jovial fraternity of artists whose very shabbiness has an affinity with the unestablished and unexpected in life — the element often gazed at with a certain wistfulness out of the curtained windows even of the highest respectability. Longmore was struck first with his looking like a very clever man and then with his looking like a contented one. The combination, as it was expressed in his face, might have arrested the attention of a less exasperated reasoner. He had a slouched hat and a yellow beard, a light easel under one arm, and an unfinished sketch in oils under the other. He stopped and stood talking for some moments to the landlady, while something pleasant played in his face. They were discussing the possibilities of dinner; the hostess enumerated some very savoury ones, and he nodded briskly, assenting to everything. It could n't be, Longmore thought, that he found such ideal ease in the prospect of lamb-chops and spinach and a *croûte aux fruits*. When the dinner had been ordered he turned up his sketch, and the good woman fell to admiring and comparing, to picking up, off by the stream-side, the objects represented.

Was it his work, Longmore wondered, that made him so happy? Was a strong talent the best thing in the world? The landlady went back to her kitchen, and the young painter stood, as if he were waiting for

something, beside the gate which opened upon the path across the fields. Longmore sat brooding and asking himself if it were n't probably better to cultivate the arts than to cultivate the passions. Before he had answered the question the painter had grown tired of waiting. He had picked up a pebble, tossed it lightly into an upper window and called familiarly "Claudine!"

Claudine appeared; Longmore heard her at the window, bidding the young man cultivate patience. "But I'm losing my light," he said; "I must have my shadows in the same place as yesterday."

"Go without me then," Claudine answered; "I'll join you in ten minutes." Her voice was fresh and young; it represented almost aggressively to Longmore that she was as pleased as her companion.

"Don't forget the Chénier," cried the young man, who, turning away, passed out of the gate and followed the path across the fields until he disappeared among the trees by the side of the stream. Who might Claudine be? Longmore vaguely wondered; and was she as pretty as her voice? Before long he had a chance to satisfy himself; she came out of the house with her hat and parasol, prepared to follow her companion. She had on a pink muslin dress and a little white hat, and she was as pretty as suffices almost any Frenchwoman to be pleasing. She had a clear brown skin and a bright dark eye and a step that made walking as light a matter as being blown — and this even though she happened to be at the moment not a little over-weighted. Her hands were encumbered with various articles involved in her pursuit of her friend.

In one arm she held her parasol and a large roll of needlework, and in the other a shawl and a heavy white umbrella, such as painters use for sketching. Meanwhile she was trying to thrust into her pocket a paper-covered volume which Longmore saw to be the poems of André Chénier, and in the effort dropping the large umbrella and marking this with a half-smiled exclamation of disgust. Longmore stepped forward and picked up the umbrella, and as she, protesting her gratitude, put out her hand to take it, he recognised her as too obliging to the young man who had preceded her.

"You've too much to carry," he said; "you must let me help you."

"You're very good, monsieur," she answered. "My husband always forgets something. He can do nothing without his umbrella. He is *d'une étourderie* —!"

"You must allow me to carry the umbrella," Longmore risked; "there's too much of it for a lady."

She assented, after many compliments to his politeness; and he walked by her side into the meadow. She went lightly and rapidly, picking her steps and glancing forward to catch a glimpse of her husband. She was graceful, she was charming, she had an air of decision and yet of accommodation, and it seemed to our friend that a young artist would work none the worse for having her seated at his side reading Chénier's iambics. They were newly married, he supposed, and evidently their path of life had none of the mocking crookedness of some others. They asked little; but what need to ask more than

such quiet summer days by a shady stream, with a comrade all amiability, to say nothing of art and books and a wide unmenaced horizon? To spend such a morning, to stroll back to dinner in the red-tiled parlour of the inn, to ramble away again as the sun got low — all this was a vision of delight which floated before him only to torture him with a sense of the impossible. All Frenchwomen were not coquettes, he noted as he kept pace with his companion. She uttered a word now and then for politeness' sake, but she never looked at him and seemed not in the least to care that he was a well-favoured and well-dressed young man. She cared for nothing but the young artist in the shabby coat and the slouched hat, and for discovering where he had set up his easel.

This was soon done. He was encamped under the trees, close to the stream, and, in the diffused green shade of the little wood, could n't have felt immediate need of his umbrella. He received a free rebuke, however, for forgetting it, and was informed of what he owed to Longmore's complaisance. He was duly grateful; he thanked our hero warmly and offered him a seat on the grass. But Longmore felt himself a marplot and lingered only long enough to glance at the young man's sketch and to see in it an easy rendering of the silvery stream and the vivid green rushes. The young wife had spread her shawl on the grass at the base of a tree and meant to seat herself when he had left them, meant to murmur Chénier's verses to the music of the gurgling river. Longmore looked a while from one of these lucky

persons to the other, barely stifled a sigh, bade them good-morning and took his departure. He knew neither where to go nor what to do; he seemed afloat on the sea of ineffectual longing. He strolled slowly back to the inn, where, in the doorway, he met the landlady returning from the butcher's with the lamb-chops for the dinner of her lodgers.

"Monsieur has made the acquaintance of the *dame* of our young painter," she said with a free smile — a smile too free for malicious meanings. "Monsieur has perhaps seen the young man's picture. It appears that he's *d'une jolie force.*"

"His picture's very charming," said Longmore, "but his *dame* is more charming still."

"She's a very nice little woman; but I pity her all the more."

"I don't see why she's to be pitied," Longmore pleaded. "They seem a very happy couple."

The landlady gave a knowing nod. "Don't trust to it, monsieur! Those artists — *ça n'a pas de principes!* From one day to another he can plant her there! I know them, *allez.* I've had them here very often; one year with one, another year with another."

Longmore was at first puzzled. Then, "You mean she's not his wife?" he asked.

She took it responsibly. "What shall I tell you? They're not *des hommes sérieux*, those gentlemen! They don't engage for eternity. It's none of my business, and I've no wish to speak ill of madame. She's *gentille* — but *gentille*, and she loves her *jeune homme* to distraction."

"Who then is so distinguished a young woman?"

asked Longmore. "What do you know about her?"

"Nothing for certain; but it's my belief that she's better than he. I've even gone so far as to believe that she's a lady — a *vraie dame* — and that she has given up a great many things for him. I do the best I can for them, but I don't believe she has had all her life to put up with a dinner of two courses." And she turned over her lamb-chops tenderly, as to say that though a good cook could imagine better things, yet if you could have but one course lamb-chops had much in their favour. "I shall do them with bread-crumbs. *Voilà les femmes, monsieur!*"

Longmore turned away with the feeling that women were indeed a measureless mystery, and that it was hard to say in which of their forms of perversity there was most merit. He walked back to Saint-Germain more slowly than he had come, with less philosophic resignation to any event and more of the urgent egotism of the passion pronounced by philosophers the supremely selfish one. Now and then the episode of the happy young painter and the charming woman who had given up a great many things for him rose vividly in his mind and seemed to mock his moral unrest like some obtrusive vision of unattainable bliss.

The landlady's gossip had cast no shadow on its brightness; her voice seemed that of the vulgar chorus of the uninitiated, which stands always ready with its gross prose rendering of the inspired passages of human action. Was it possible a man could take *that* from a woman — take all that lent lightness to that

other woman's footstep and grace to her surrender and not give her the absolute certainty of a devotion as unalterable as the process of the sun? Was it possible that so clear a harmony had the seeds of trouble, that the charm of so perfect union could be broken by anything but death? Longmore felt an immense desire to cry out a thousand times "No!" for it seemed to him at last that he was somehow only a graver equivalent of the young lover and that rustling Claudine was a lighter sketch of Madame de Mauves. The heat of the sun, as he walked along, became oppressive, and when he re-entered the forest he turned aside into the deepest shade he could find and stretched himself on the mossy ground at the foot of a great beech. He lay for a while staring up into the verdurous dusk overhead and trying mentally to see his friend at Saint-Germain hurry toward some quiet stream-side where *he* waited, as he had seen that trusting creature hurry an hour before. It would be hard to say how well he succeeded; but the effort soothed rather than excited him, and as he had had a good deal both of moral and physical fatigue he sank at last into a quiet sleep. While he slept moreover he had a strange and vivid dream. He seemed to be in a wood, very much like the one on which his eyes had lately closed; but the wood was divided by the murmuring stream he had left an hour before. He was walking up and down, he thought, restlessly and in intense expectation of some momentous event. Suddenly, at a distance, through the trees, he saw a gleam of a woman's dress, on which he hastened to meet her. As he advanced he recognised her, but he

saw at the same time that she was on the other bank of the river. She seemed at first not to notice him, but when they had come to opposite places she stopped and looked at him very gravely and pityingly. She made him no sign that he must cross the stream, but he wished unutterably to stand by her side. He knew the water was deep, and it seemed to him he knew how he should have to breast it and how he feared that when he rose to the surface she would have disappeared. Nevertheless he was going to plunge when a boat turned into the current from above and came swiftly toward them, guided by an oarsman who was sitting so that they could n't see his face. He brought the boat to the bank where Longmore stood; the latter stepped in, and with a few strokes they touched the opposite shore. Longmore got out and, though he was sure he had crossed the stream, Madame de Mauves was not there. He turned with a kind of agony and saw that now she was on the other bank — the one he had left. She gave him a grave silent glance and walked away up the stream. The boat and the boatman resumed their course, but after going a short distance they stopped and the boatman turned back and looked at the still divided couple. Then Longmore recognised him — just as he had recognised him a few days before at the restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne.

VIII

He must have slept some time after he ceased dreaming, for he had no immediate memory of this vision. It came back to him later, after he had roused himself and had walked nearly home. No great arrangement was needed to make it seem a striking allegory, and it haunted and oppressed him for the rest of the day. He took refuge, however, in his quickened conviction that the only sound policy in life is to grasp unsparingly at happiness; and it seemed no more than one of the vigorous measures dictated by such a policy to return that evening to Madame de Mauves. And yet when he had decided to do so and had carefully dressed himself he felt an irresistible nervous tremor which made it easier to linger at his open window, wondering with a strange mixture of dread and desire whether Madame Clairin had repeated to her sister-in-law what she had said to him. His presence now might be simply a gratuitous annoyance, and yet his absence might seem to imply that it was in the power of circumstances to make them ashamed to meet each other's eyes. He sat a long time with his head in his hands, lost in a painful confusion of hopes and ambiguities. He felt at moments as if he could throttle Madame Clairin, and yet could n't help asking himself if it were n't possible she had done him a service. It was late when he left the hotel, and as he entered the gate of the other house his heart beat so fast that he was sure his voice would show it.

The servant ushered him into the drawing-room, which was empty and with the lamp burning low. But the long windows were open and their light curtains swaying in a soft warm wind, so that Longmore immediately stepped out upon the terrace. There he found Madame de Mauves alone, slowly pacing its length. She was dressed in white, very simply, and her hair was arranged not as she usually wore it, but in a single loose coil and as if she were unprepared for company. She stopped when she saw her friend, showed some surprise, uttered an exclamation and stood waiting for him to speak. He tried, with his eyes on her, to say something, but found no words. He knew it was awkward, it was offensive, to stand gazing at her; but he could n't say what was suitable and might n't say what he wished. Her face was indistinct in the dim light, but he felt her eyes fixed on him and wondered what they expressed. Did they warn him, did they plead, or did they confess to a sense of provocation? For an instant his head swam; he was sure it would make all things clear to stride forward and fold her in his arms. But a moment later he was still dumb there before her; he had n't moved; he knew she had spoken, but he had n't understood.

"You were here this morning," she continued; and now, slowly, the meaning of her words came to him. "I had a bad headache and had to shut myself up." She spoke with her usual voice.

Longmore mastered his agitation and answered her without betraying himself. "I hope you 're better now."

"Yes, thank you, I 'm better — much better."

He waited again and she moved away to a chair and seated herself. After a pause he followed her and leaned closer to her, against the balustrade of the terrace. "I hoped you might have been able to come out for the morning into the forest. I went alone; it was a lovely day, and I took a long walk."

"It was a lovely day," she said absently, and sat with her eyes lowered, slowly opening and closing her fan. Longmore, as he watched her, felt more and more assured her sister-in-law had seen her since her interview with him; that her attitude toward him was changed. It was this same something that hampered the desire with which he had come, or at least converted all his imagined freedom of speech about it to a final hush of wonder. No, certainly, he could n't clasp her to his arms now, any more than some antique worshipper could have clasped the marble statue in his temple. But Longmore's statue spoke at last with a full human voice and even with a shade of human hesitation. She looked up, and it seemed to him her eyes shone through the dusk.

"I 'm very glad you came this evening — and I 've a particular reason for being glad. I half-expected you, and yet I thought it possible you might n't come."

"As the case has been present to me," Longmore answered, "it was impossible I should n't come. I 've spent every minute of the day in thinking of you."

She made no immediate reply, but continued to open and close her fan thoughtfully. At last, "I 've something important to say to you," she resumed with decision. "I want you to know to a certainty

that I've a very high opinion of you." Longmore gave an uneasy shift to his position. To what was she coming? But he said nothing, and she went on: "I take a great interest in you. There's no reason why I should n't say it. I feel a great friendship for you." He began to laugh, all awkwardly — he hardly knew why, unless because this seemed the very irony of detachment. But she went on in her way: "You know, I suppose, that a great disappointment always implies a great confidence — a great hope."

"I've certainly hoped," he said, "hoped strongly; but doubtless never rationally enough to have a right to bemoan my disappointment."

There was something troubled in her face that seemed all the while to burn clearer. "You do yourself injustice. I've such confidence in your fairness of mind that I should be greatly disappointed if I were to find it wanting."

"I really almost believe you're amusing yourself at my expense," the young man cried. "My fairness of mind? Of all the question-begging terms!" he laughed. "The only thing for one's mind to be fair to is the thing one *feels!*"

She rose to her feet and looked at him hard. His eyes by this time were accustomed to the imperfect light, and he could see that if she was urgent she was yet beseechingly kind. She shook her head impatiently and came near enough to lay her fan on his arm with a strong pressure. "If that were so it would be a weary world. I know enough, however, of your probable attitude. You need n't try to express it. It's enough that your sincerity gives me the right to

ask a favour of you — to make an intense, a solemn request."

"Make it; I listen."

"*Don't disappoint me.* If you don't understand me now you will to-morrow or very soon. When I said just now that I had a high opinion of you, you see I meant it very seriously," she explained. "It was n't a vain compliment. I believe there 's no appeal one may make to your generosity that can remain long unanswered. If this were to happen — if I were to find you selfish where I thought you generous, narrow where I thought you large" — and she spoke slowly, her voice lingering with all emphasis on each of these words —"vulgar where I thought you rare, I should think worse of human nature. I should take it, I assure you, very hard indeed. I should say to myself in the dull days of the future: 'There was *one* man who might have done so and so, and he too failed.' But this shan't be. You 've made too good an impression on me not to make the very best. If you wish to please me for ever there 's a way."

She was standing close to him, with her dress touching him, her eyes fixed on his. As she went on her tone became, to his sense, extraordinary, and she offered the odd spectacle of a beautiful woman preaching reason with the most communicative and irresistible passion. Longmore was dazzled, but mystified and bewildered. The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal, but her presence and effect there, so close, so urgent, so personal, a distracting contradiction of it. She had never been so lovely. In her white dress, with her pale face and

deeply-lighted brow, she seemed the very spirit of the summer night. When she had ceased speaking she drew a long breath; he felt it on his cheek, and it stirred in his whole being a sudden perverse imagination. Were not her words, in their high impossible rigour, a mere challenge to his sincerity, a mere precaution of her pride, meant to throw into relief her almost ghostly beauty, and was n't this the only truth, the only law, the only thing to take account of?

He closed his eyes and felt her watch him not without pain and perplexity herself. He looked at her again, met her own eyes and saw them fill with strange tears. Then this last sophistry of his great desire for her knew itself touched as a bubble is pricked; it died away with a stifled murmur, and her beauty, more and more radiant in the darkness, rose before him as a symbol of something vague which was yet more beautiful than itself. "I may understand you to-morrow," he said, "but I don't understand you now."

"And yet I took counsel with myself to-day and asked myself how I had best speak to you. On one side I might have refused to see you at all." Longmore made a violent movement, and she added: "In that case I should have written to you. I might see you, I thought, and simply say to you that there were excellent reasons why we should part, and that I begged this visit should be your last. This I inclined to do; what made me decide otherwise was — well, simply that I like you so. I said to myself that I should be glad to remember in future days, not that I had, in the horrible phrase, got rid of you, but that

you had gone away out of the fulness of your own wisdom and the excellence of your own taste."

"Ah wisdom and taste!" the poor young man wailed.

"I'm prepared, if necessary," Madame de Mauves continued after a pause, "to fall back on my strict right. But, as I said before, I shall be greatly disappointed if I'm obliged to do that."

"When I listen to your horrible and unnatural lucidity," Longmore answered, "I feel so angry, so merely sore and sick, that I wonder I don't leave you without more words."

"If you should go away in anger this idea of mine about our parting would be but half-realised," she returned with no drop in her ardour. "No, I don't want to think of you as feeling a great pain, I don't want even to think of you as making a great sacrifice. I want to think of you —"

"As a stupid brute who has never existed, who never *can* exist!" he broke in. "A creature who could know you without loving you, who could leave you without for ever missing you!"

She turned impatiently away and walked to the other end of the terrace. When she came back he saw that her impatience had grown sharp and almost hard. She stood before him again, looking at him from head to foot and without consideration now; so that as the effect of it he felt his assurance finally quite sink. This then she took from him, withholding in consequence something she had meant to say. She moved off afresh, walked to the other end of the terrace and stood there with her face to the garden.

She assumed that he understood her, and slowly, slowly, half as the fruit of this mute pressure, he let everything go but the rage of a purpose somehow still to please her. She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly. She must have "liked" him indeed, as she said, to wish so to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her tenderness still in her dreadful consistency, his spirit rose with a new flight and suddenly felt itself breathe clearer air. Her profession ceased to seem a mere bribe to his eagerness; it was charged with eagerness itself; it was a present reward and would somehow last. He moved rapidly toward her as with the sense of a gage that he might sublimely yet immediately enjoy.

They were separated by two thirds of the length of the terrace, and he had to pass the drawing-room window. As he did so he started with an exclamation. Madame Clairin stood framed in the opening as if, though just arriving on the scene, she too were already aware of its interest. Conscious, apparently, that she might be suspected of having watched them she stepped forward with a smile and looked from one to the other. "Such a tête-à-tête as that one owes no apology for interrupting. One ought to come in for good manners."

Madame de Mauves turned to her, but answered nothing. She looked straight at Longmore, and her eyes shone with a lustre that struck him as divine. He was not exactly sure indeed what she meant them to say, but it translated itself to something that

would do. "Call it what you will, what you've wanted to urge upon me is the thing this woman can best conceive. What I ask of you is something she can't begin to!" They seemed somehow to beg him to suffer her to be triumphantly herself, and to intimate — yet this too all decently — how little that self was of Madame Clairin's particular swelling measure. He felt an immense answering desire not to do anything then that might seem probable or *prévu* to this lady. He had laid his hat and stick on the parapet of the terrace. He took them up, offered his hand to Madame de Mauves with a simple good-night, bowed silently to Madame Clairin and found his way, with tingling ears, out of the place.

IX

He went home and, without lighting his candle, flung himself on his bed. But he got no sleep till morning; he lay hour after hour tossing, thinking, wondering; his mind had never been so active. It seemed to him his friend had laid on him in those last moments a heavy charge and had expressed herself almost as handsomely as if she had listened complacently to an assurance of his love. It was neither easy nor delightful thoroughly to understand her; but little by little her perfect meaning sank into his mind and soothed it with a sense of opportunity which somehow stifled his sense of loss. For, to begin with, she meant that she could love him in no degree or contingency, in no imaginable future. This was absolute — he knew he could no more alter it than he could pull down one of the constellations he lay gazing at through his open window. He wondered to what it was, in the background of her life, she had so dedicated herself. A conception of duty unquenchable to the end? A love that no outrage could stifle? "Great heaven!" he groaned; "is the world so rich in the purest pearls of passion that such tenderness as that can be wasted for ever — poured away without a sigh into bottomless darkness?" Had she, in spite of the detestable present, some precious memory that still kept the door of possibility open? Was she prepared to submit to everything and yet to believe? Was it strength,

was it weakness, was it a vulgar fear, was it conviction, conscience, constancy?

Longmore sank back with a sigh and an oppressive feeling that it was vain to guess at such a woman's motives. He only felt that those of this one were buried deep in her soul and that they must be of the noblest, must contain nothing base. He had his hard impression that endless constancy was all her law — a constancy that still found a foothold among crumbling ruins. "She has loved once," he said to himself as he rose and wandered to his window; "and that 's for ever. Yes, yes — if she loved again she 'd be *common*." He stood for a long time looking out into the starlit silence of the town and forest and thinking of what life would have been if his constancy had met her own in earlier days. But life was this now, and he must live. It was living, really, to stand there with such a faith even in one's self still flung over one by such hands. He was not to disappoint her, he was to justify a conception it had beguiled her weariness to form. His imagination embraced it; he threw back his head and seemed to be looking for his friend's conception among the blinking mocking stars. But it came to him rather on the mild night-wind wandering in over the house-tops which covered the rest of so many heavy human hearts. What she asked he seemed to feel her ask not for her own sake — she feared nothing, she needed nothing — but for that of his own happiness and his own character. He must assent to destiny. Why else was he young and strong, intelligent and resolute? He must n't give it to her to reproach him with thinking she had had a moment's

attention for his love, give it to her to plead, to argue, to break off in bitterness. He must see everything from above, her indifference and his own ardour; he must prove his strength, must do the handsome thing, must decide that the handsome thing was to submit to the inevitable, to be supremely delicate, to spare her all pain, to stifle his passion, to ask no compensation, to depart without waiting and to try to believe that wisdom is its own reward. All this, neither more nor less, it was a matter of beautiful friendship with him for her to expect of him. And what should he himself gain by it? He should have pleased her! Well, he flung himself on his bed again, fell asleep at last and slept till morning.

Before noon next day he had made up his mind to leave Saint-Germain at once. It seemed easiest to go without seeing her, and yet if he might ask for a grain of "compensation" this would be five minutes face to face with her. He passed a restless day. Wherever he went he saw her stand before him in the dusky halo of evening, saw her look at him with an air of still negation more intoxicating than the most passionate self-surrender. He must certainly go, and yet it was hideously hard. He compromised and went to Paris to spend the rest of the day. He strolled along the boulevard and paused sightlessly before the shops, sat a while in the Tuileries gardens and looked at the shabby unfortunates for whom this only was nature and summer; but simply felt afresh, as a result of it all, the dusty dreary lonely world to which Madame de Mauves had consigned him.

In a sombre mood he made his way back to the

centre of motion and sat down at a table before a café door, on the great plain of hot asphalt. Night arrived, the lamps were lighted, the tables near him found occupants, and Paris began to wear that evening grimace of hers that seems to tell, in the flare of plate glass and of theatre-doors, the muffled rumble of swift-rolling carriages, how this is no world for you unless you have your pockets lined and your delicacies perverted. Longmore, however, had neither scruples nor desires; he looked at the great preoccupied place for the first time with an easy sense of repaying its indifference. Before long a carriage drove up to the pavement directly in front of him and remained standing for several minutes without sign from its occupant. It was one of those neat plain coupés, drawn by a single powerful horse, in which the *flâneur* figures a pale handsome woman buried among silk cushions and yawning as she sees the gas-lamps glittering in the gutters. At last the door opened and out stepped Richard de Mauves. He stopped and leaned on the window for some time, talking in an excited manner to a person within. At last he gave a nod and the carriage rolled away. He stood swinging his cane and looking up and down the boulevard, with the air of a man fumbling, as one might say, the loose change of time. He turned toward the café and was apparently, for want of anything better worth his attention, about to seat himself at one of the tables when he noticed Longmore. He wavered an instant and then, without a shade of difference in his careless gait, advanced to the accompaniment of a thin recognition.

It was the first time they had met since their en-

counter in the forest after Longmore's false start for Brussels. Madame Clairin's revelations, as he might have regarded them, had not made the Count especially present to his mind; he had had another call to meet than the call of disgust. But now, as M. de Mauves came toward him he felt abhorrence well up. He made out, however, for the first time, a cloud on this nobleman's superior clearness, and a delight at finding the shoe somewhere at last pinching *him*, mingled with the resolve to be blank and unaccommodating, enabled him to meet the occasion with due promptness.

M. de Mauves sat down, and the two men looked at each other across the table, exchanging formal remarks that did little to lend grace to their encounter. Longmore had no reason to suppose the Count knew of his sister's various interventions. He was sure M. de Mauves cared very little about his opinions, and yet he had a sense of something grim in his own New York face which would have made him change colour if keener suspicion had helped it to be read there. M. de Mauves did n't change colour, but he looked at his wife's so oddly, so more than naturally (would n't it be?) detached friend with an intentness that betrayed at once an irritating memory of the episode in the Bois de Boulogne and such vigilant curiosity as was natural to a gentleman who had entrusted his "honour" to another gentleman's magnanimity — or to his artlessness.

It might appear that these virtues shone out of our young man less engagingly or reassuringly than a few days before; the shadow at any rate fell darker

across the brow of his critic, who turned away and frowned while lighting a cigar. The person in the coupé, he accordingly judged, whether or no the same person as the heroine of the episode of the Bois de Boulogne, was not a source of unalloyed delight. Longmore had dark blue eyes of admirable clarity, settled truth-telling eyes which had in his childhood always made his harshest taskmasters smile at his notion of a subterfuge. An observer watching the two men and knowing something of their relations would certainly have said that what he had at last both to recognise and to miss in those eyes must not a little have puzzled and tormented M. de Mauves. They took possession of him, they laid him out, they measured him in that state of flatness, they triumphed over him, they treated him as no pair of eyes had perhaps ever treated any member of his family before. The Count's scheme had been to provide for a positive state of ease on the part of no one save himself, but here was Longmore already, if appearances perhaps not appreciable to the vulgar meant anything, primed as for some prospect of pleasure more than Parisian. Was this candid young barbarian but a *faux bonhomme* after all? He had never really quite satisfied his occasional host, but was he now, for a climax, to leave him almost gaping?

M. de Mauves, as if hating to seem preoccupied, took up the evening paper to help himself to seem indifferent. As he glanced over it he threw off some perfunctory allusion to the crisis — the political — which enabled Longmore to reply with perfect veracity that, with other things to think about, he had

had no attention to spare for it. And yet our hero was in truth far from secure against rueful reflexion. The Count's ruffled state was a comfort so far as it pointed to the possibility that the lady in the coupé might be proving too many for him; but it ministered to no vindictive sweetness for Longmore so far as it should perhaps represent rising jealousy. It passed through his mind that jealousy is a passion with a double face and that on one of its sides it may sometimes almost look generous. It glimmered upon him odiously M. de Mauves might grow ashamed of his political compact with his wife, and he felt how far more tolerable it would be in future to think of him as always impertinent than to think of him as occasionally contrite. The two men pretended meanwhile for half an hour to outsit each other conveniently; and the end — at that rate — might have been distant had not the tension in some degree yielded to the arrival of a friend of M. de Mauves — a tall pale consumptive-looking dandy who filled the air with the odour of heliotrope. He looked up and down the boulevard wearily, examined the Count's garments in some detail, then appeared to refer restlessly to his own, and at last announced resignedly that the Duchess was in town. M. de Mauves must come with him to call; she had abused him dreadfully a couple of evenings before — a sure sign she wanted to see him. "I depend on you," said with an infantine drawl this specimen of an order Longmore felt he had never had occasion so intimately to appreciate, "to put her *en train*."

M. de Mauves resisted, he protested that he was

d'une humeur massacrante; but at last he allowed himself to be drawn to his feet and stood looking awkwardly — awkwardly for M. de Mauves — at Longmore. "You 'll excuse me," he appeared to find some difficulty in saying; "you too probably have occupation for the evening?"

"None but to catch my train." And our friend looked at his watch.

"Ah you go back to Saint-Germain?"

"In half an hour."

M. de Mauves seemed on the point of disengaging himself from his companion's arm, which was locked in his own; but on the latter's uttering some persuasive murmur he lifted his hat stiffly and turned away.

Longmore the next day wandered off to the terrace to try and beguile the restlessness with which he waited for the evening; he wished to see Madame de Mauves for the last time at the hour of long shadows and pale reflected amber lights, as he had almost always seen her. Destiny, however, took no account of this humble plea for poetic justice; it was appointed him to meet her seated by the great walk under a tree and alone. The hour made the place almost empty; the day was warm, but as he took his place beside her a light breeze stirred the leafy edges of their broad circle of shadow. She looked at him almost with no pretence of not having believed herself already rid of him, and he at once told her that he should leave Saint-Germain that evening, but must first bid her farewell. Her face lighted a moment, he fancied, as he spoke; but she said nothing,

only turning it off to far Paris which lay twinkling and flashing through hot exhalations. "I've a request to make of you," he added. "That you think of me as a man who has felt much and claimed little."

She drew a long breath which almost suggested pain. "I can't think of you as unhappy. That's impossible. You've a life to lead, you've duties, talents, inspirations, interests. I shall hear of your career. And then," she pursued after a pause, though as if it had before this quite been settled between them, "one can't be unhappy through having a better opinion of a friend instead of a worse."

For a moment he failed to understand her. "Do you mean that there can be varying degrees in my opinion of you?"

She rose and pushed away her chair. "I mean," she said quickly, "that it's better to have done nothing in bitterness — nothing in passion." And she began to walk.

Longmore followed her without answering at first. But he took off his hat and with his pocket-handkerchief wiped his forehead. "Where shall you go? what shall you do?" he simply asked at last.

"Do? I shall do as I've always done — except perhaps that I shall go for a while to my husband's old home."

"I shall go to *my* old one. I've done with Europe for the present," the young man added.

She glanced at him as he walked beside her, after he had spoken these words, and then bent her eyes for a long time on the ground. But suddenly, as if aware of her going too far, she stopped and put out

her hand. "Good-bye. May you have all the happiness you deserve!"

He took her hand with his eyes on her, but something was at work in him that made it impossible to deal in the easy way with her touch. Something of infinite value was floating past him, and he had taken an oath, with which any such case interfered, not to raise a finger to stop it. It was borne by the strong current of the world's great life and not of his own small one. Madame de Mauves disengaged herself, gathered in her long scarf and smiled at him almost as you would do at a child you should wish to encourage. Several moments later he was still there watching her leave him and leave him. When she was out of sight he shook himself, walked at once back to his hotel and, without waiting for the evening train, paid his bill and departed.

Later in the day M. de Mauves came into his wife's drawing-room, where she sat waiting to be summoned to dinner. He had dressed as he usually did n't dress for dining at home. He walked up and down for some moments in silence, then rang the bell for a servant and went out into the hall to meet him. He ordered the carriage to take him to the station, paused a moment with his hand on the knob of the door, dismissed the servant angrily as the latter lingered observing him, re-entered the drawing-room, resumed his restless walk and at last stopped abruptly before his wife, who had taken up a book. "May I ask the favour," he said with evident effort, in spite of a forced smile as of allusion to a large past exercise of the very best taste, "of having a question answered?"

"It's a favour I never refused," she replied.

"Very true. Do you expect this evening a visit from Mr. Longmore?"

"Mr. Longmore," said his wife, "has left Saint-Germain." M. de Mauves waited, but his smile expired. "Mr. Longmore," his wife continued, "has gone to America."

M. de Mauves took it — a rare thing for him — with confessed, if momentary, intellectual indigence. But he raised, as it were, the wind. "Has anything happened?" he asked. "Had he a sudden call?"

But his question received no answer. At the same moment the servant threw open the door and announced dinner; Madame Clairin rustled in, rubbing her white hands, Madame de Mauves passed silently into the dining-room, but he remained outside — outside of more things, clearly, than his mere *salle-à-manger*. Before long he went forth to the terrace and continued his uneasy walk. At the end of a quarter of an hour the servant came to let him know that his carriage was at the door. "Send it away," he said without hesitation. "I shan't use it." When the ladies had half-finished dinner he returned and joined them, with a formal apology to his wife for his inconsequence.

The dishes were brought back, but he hardly tasted them; he drank on the other hand more wine than usual. There was little talk, scarcely a convivial sound save the occasional expressive appreciative "M-m-m!" of Madame Clairin over the succulence of some dish. Twice this lady saw her brother's eyes, fixed on her own over his wineglass, put to her a ques-

tion she knew she should have to irritate him later on by not being able to answer. She replied, for the present at least, by an elevation of the eyebrows that resembled even to her own humour the vain raising of an umbrella in anticipation of a storm. M. de Mauves was left alone to finish his wine; he sat over it for more than an hour and let the darkness gather about him. At last the servant came in with a letter and lighted a candle. The letter was a telegram, which M. de Mauves, when he had read it, burnt at the candle. After five minutes' meditation he wrote a message on the back of a visiting-card and gave it to the servant to carry to the office. The man knew quite as much as his master suspected about the lady to whom the telegram was addressed; but its contents puzzled him; they consisted of the single word "*Impossible.*" As the evening passed without her brother's reappearing in the drawing-room Madame Clairin came to him where he sat by his solitary candle. He took no notice of her presence for some time, but this affected her as unexpected indulgence. At last, however, he spoke with a particular harshness. "*Ce jeune mufle* has gone home at an hour's notice. What the devil does it mean?"

Madame Clairin now felt thankful for her umbrella. "It means that I've a sister-in-law whom I've not the honour to understand."

He said nothing more and silently allowed her, after a little, to depart. It had been her duty to provide him with an explanation, and he was disgusted with her blankness; but she was — if there was no more to come — getting off easily. When she had

gone he went into the garden and walked up and down with his cigar. He saw his wife seated alone on the terrace, but remained below, wandering, turning, pausing, lingering. He remained a long time. It grew late and Madame de Mauves disappeared. Toward midnight he dropped upon a bench, tired, with a long vague exhalation of unrest. It was sinking into his spirit that he too did n't understand Madame Clairin's sister-in-law.

Longmore was obliged to wait a week in London for a ship. It was very hot, and he went out one day to Richmond. In the garden of the hotel at which he dined he met his friend Mrs. Draper, who was staying there. She made eager enquiry about Madame de Mauves; but Longmore at first, as they sat looking out at the famous view of the Thames, parried her questions and confined himself to other topics. At last she said she was afraid he had something to conceal; whereupon, after a pause, he asked her if she remembered recommending him, in the letter she had addressed him at Saint-Germain, to draw the sadness from her friend's smile. "The last I saw of her was her smile," he said — "when I bade her good-bye."

"I remember urging you to 'console' her," Mrs. Draper returned, "and I wondered afterwards whether — model of discretion as you are — I had n't cut you out work for which you would n't thank me."

"She has her consolation in herself," the young man said; "she needs none that any one else can offer her. That 's for troubles for which — be it more,

be it less — our own folly has to answer. Madame de Mauves has n't a grain of folly left."

"Ah don't say that!" — Mrs. Draper knowingly protested. "Just a little folly 's often very graceful."

Longmore rose to go — she somehow annoyed him. "Don't talk of grace," he said, "till you 've measured her reason!"

For two years after his return to America he heard nothing of Madame de Mauves. That he thought of her intently, constantly, I need hardly say; most people wondered why such a clever young man should n't "devote" himself to something; but to himself he seemed absorbingly occupied. He never wrote to her; he believed she would n't have "liked" it. At last he heard that Mrs. Draper had come home and he immediately called on her. "Of course," she said after the first greetings, "you 're dying for news of Madame de Mauves. Prepare yourself for something strange. I heard from her two or three times during the year after your seeing her. She left Saint-Germain and went to live in the country on some old property of her husband's. She wrote me very kind little notes, but I felt somehow that — in spite of what you said about 'consolation' — they were the notes of a wretched woman. The only advice I could have given her was to leave her scamp of a husband and come back to her own land and her own people. But this I did n't feel free to do, and yet it made me so miserable not to be able to help her that I preferred to let our correspondence die a natural death. I had no news of her for a year. Last summer, however, I met at Vichy a clever young Frenchman

whom I accidentally learned to be a friend of that charming sister of the Count's, Madame Clairin. I lost no time in asking him what he knew about Madame de Mauves — a countrywoman of mine and an old friend. 'I congratulate you on the friendship of such a person,' he answered. 'That's the terrible little woman who killed her husband.' You may imagine I promptly asked for an explanation, and he told me — from his point of view — what he called the whole story. M. de Mauves had *fait quelques folies* which his wife had taken absurdly to heart. He had repented and asked her forgiveness, which she had inexorably refused. She was very pretty, and severity must have suited her style; for, whether or no her husband had been in love with her before, he fell madly in love with her now. He was the proudest man in France, but he had begged her on his knees to be re-admitted to favour. All in vain! She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. People noticed a great change in him; he gave up society, ceased to care for anything, looked shockingly. One fine day they discovered he had blown out his brains. My friend had the story of course from Madame Clairin."

Longmore was strongly moved, and his first impulse after he had recovered his composure was to return immediately to Europe. But several years have passed, and he still lingers at home. The truth is that, in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Madame de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling — a feeling of wonder, of uncertainty, of awe.

A PASSIONATE PILGRIM

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I

INTENDING to sail for America in the early part of June, I determined to spend the interval of six weeks in England, to which country my mind's eye only had as yet been introduced. I had formed in Italy and France a resolute preference for old inns, considering that what they sometimes cost the ungratified body they repay the delighted mind. On my arrival in London, therefore, I lodged at a certain antique hostelry, much to the east of Temple Bar, deep in the quarter that I had inevitably figured as the Johnsonian. Here, on the first evening of my stay, I descended to the little coffee-room and bespoke my dinner of the genius of "attendance" in the person of the solitary waiter. No sooner had I crossed the threshold of this retreat than I felt I had cut a golden-ripe crop of English "impressions." The coffee-room of the Red Lion, like so many other places and things I was destined to see in the motherland, seemed to have been waiting for long years, with just that sturdy sufferance of time written on its visage, for me to come and extract the romantic essence of it.

The latent preparedness of the American mind even for the most characteristic features of English life was a matter I meanwhile failed to get to the bottom of. The roots of it are indeed so deeply buried

in the soil of our early culture that, without some great upheaval of feeling, we are at a loss to say exactly when and where and how it begins. It makes an American's enjoyment of England an emotion more searching than anything Continental. I had seen the coffee-room of the Red Lion years ago, at home — at Saragossa Illinois — in books, in visions, in dreams, in Dickens, in Smollett, in Boswell. It was small and subdivided into six narrow compartments by a series of perpendicular screens of mahogany, something higher than a man's stature, furnished on either side with a meagre uncushioned ledge, denominated in ancient Britain a seat. In each of these rigid receptacles was a narrow table — a table expected under stress to accommodate no less than four pairs of active British elbows. High pressure indeed had passed away from the Red Lion for ever. It now knew only that of memories and ghosts and atmosphere. Round the room there marched, breast-high, a magnificent panelling of mahogany, so dark with time and so polished with unremitted friction that by gazing a while into its lucid blackness I made out the dim reflexion of a party of wigged gentlemen in knee-breeches just arrived from York by the coach. On the dark yellow walls, coated by the fumes of English coal, of English mutton, of Scotch whiskey, were a dozen melancholy prints, sallow-toned with age — the Derby favourite of the year 1807, the Bank of England, her Majesty the Queen. On the floor was a Turkey carpet — as old as the mahogany almost, as the Bank of England, as the Queen — into which the waiter had in his lonely revolutions trodden

so many massive soot-flakes and drops of overflowing beer that the glowing looms of Smyrna would certainly not have recognised it. To say that I ordered my dinner of this archaic type would be altogether to misrepresent the process owing to which, having dreamed of lamb and spinach and a *salade de saison*, I sat down in penitence to a mutton-chop and a rice pudding. Bracing my feet against the cross-beam of my little oaken table, I opposed to the mahogany partition behind me the vigorous dorsal resistance that must have expressed the old-English idea of repose. The sturdy screen refused even to creak, but my poor Yankee joints made up the deficiency.

While I was waiting there for my chop there came into the room a person whom, after I had looked at him a moment, I supposed to be a fellow lodger and probably the only one. He seemed, like myself, to have submitted to proposals for dinner; the table on the other side of my partition had been prepared to receive him. He walked up to the fire, exposed his back to it and, after consulting his watch, looked directly out of the window and indirectly at me. He was a man of something less than middle age and more than middle stature, though indeed you would have called him neither young nor tall. He was chiefly remarkable for his emphasised leanness. His hair, very thin on the summit of his head, was dark short and fine. His eye was of a pale turbid grey, unsuited, perhaps, to his dark hair and well-drawn brows, but not altogether out of harmony with his colourless bilious complexion. His nose was aquiline and delicate; beneath it his moustache languished much

rather than bristled. His mouth and chin were negative, or at the most provisional; not vulgar, doubtless, but ineffectually refined. A cold fatal gentlemanly weakness was expressed indeed in his attenuated person. His eye was restless and deprecating; his whole physiognomy, his manner of shifting his weight from foot to foot, the spiritless droop of his head, told of exhausted intentions, of a will relaxed. His dress was neat and "toned down" — he might have been in mourning. I made up my mind on three points: he was a bachelor, he was out of health, he was not indigenous to the soil. The waiter approached him, and they conversed in accents barely audible. I heard the words "claret," "sherry" with a tentative inflexion, and finally "beer" with its last letter changed to "ah." Perhaps he was a Russian in reduced circumstances; he reminded me slightly of certain sceptical cosmopolite Russians whom I had met on the Continent.

While in my extravagant way I followed this train — for you see I was interested — there appeared a short brisk man with reddish-brown hair, with a vulgar nose, a sharp blue eye and a red beard confined to his lower jaw and chin. My putative Russian, still in possession of the rug, let his mild gaze stray over the dingy ornaments of the room. The other drew near, and his umbrella dealt a playful poke at the concave melancholy waistcoat. "A penny ha'penny for your thoughts!"

My friend, as I call him, uttered an exclamation, stared, then laid his two hands on the other's shoulders. The latter looked round at me keenly, compass-

ing me in a momentary glance. I read in its own vague light that this was a transatlantic eyebeam; and with such confidence that I hardly needed to see its owner, as he prepared, with his companion, to seat himself at the table adjoining my own, take from his overcoat-pocket three New York newspapers and lay them beside his plate. As my neighbours proceeded to dine I felt the crumbs of their conversation scattered pretty freely abroad. I could hear almost all they said, without straining to catch it, over the top of the partition that divided us. Occasionally their voices dropped to recovery of discretion, but the mystery pieced itself together as if on purpose to entertain me. Their speech was pitched in the key that may in English air be called alien in spite of a few coincidences. The voices were American, however, with a difference; and I had no hesitation in assigning the softer and clearer sound to the pale thin gentleman, whom I decidedly preferred to his comrade. The latter began to question him about his voyage.

"Horrible, horrible! I was deadly sick from the hour we left New York."

"Well, you do look considerably reduced," said the second-comer.

"Reduced! I've been on the verge of the grave. I have n't slept six hours for three weeks." This was said with great gravity. "Well, I've made the voyage for the last time."

"The plague you have! You mean to locate here permanently?"

"Oh it won't be so very permanent!"

There was a pause; after which: "You're the same merry old boy, Searle. Going to give up the ghost to-morrow, eh?"

"I almost wish I were."

"You're not so sweet on England then? I've heard people say at home that you dress and talk and act like an Englishman. But I know these people here and I know you. You're not one of this crowd, Clement Searle, not you. You'll go under here, sir; you'll go under as sure as my name's Simmons."

Following this I heard a sudden clatter as of the drop of a knife and fork. "Well, you're a delicate sort of creature, if it *is* your ugly name! I've been wandering about all day in this accursed city, ready to cry with homesickness and heartsickness and every possible sort of sickness, and thinking, in the absence of anything better, of meeting you here this evening and of your uttering some sound of cheer and comfort and giving me some glimmer of hope. Go under? Ain't I under now? I can't do more than get under the ground!"

Mr. Simmons's superior brightness appeared to flicker a moment in this gust of despair, but the next it was burning steady again. "*Don't* 'cry,' Searle," I heard him say. "Remember the waiter. I've grown Englishman enough for that. For heaven's sake don't let 's have any nerves. Nerves won't do anything for you here. It's best to come to the point. Tell me in three words what you expect of me."

I heard another movement, as if poor Searle had collapsed in his chair. "Upon my word, sir, you're quite inconceivable. You never got my letter?"

"Yes, I got your letter. I was never sorrier to get anything in my life."

At this declaration Mr. Searle rattled out an oath, which it was well perhaps that I but partially heard. "Abijah Simmons," he then cried, "what demon of perversity possesses you? Are you going to betray me here in a foreign land, to turn out a false friend, a heartless rogue?"

"Go on, sir," said sturdy Simmons. "Pour it all out. I'll wait till you've done. Your beer's lovely," he observed independently to the waiter. "I'll have some more."

"For God's sake explain yourself!" his companion appealed.

There was a pause, at the end of which I heard Mr. Simmons set down his empty tankard with emphasis. "You poor morbid mooning man," he resumed, "I don't want to say anything to make you feel sore. I regularly pity you. But you must allow that you've acted more like a confirmed crank than a member of our best society — in which every one's so sensible."

Mr. Searle seemed to have made an effort to compose himself. "Be so good as to tell me then what was the meaning of your letter."

"Well, you had got on *my* nerves, if you want to know, when I wrote it. It came of my always wishing so to please folks. I had much better have let you alone. To tell you the plain truth I never was so horrified in my life as when I found that on the strength of my few kind words you had come out here to seek your fortune."

"What then did you expect me to do?"

"I expected you to wait patiently till I had made further enquiries and had written you again."

"And you've made further enquiries now?"

"Enquiries! I've committed assaults."

"And you find I've no claim?"

"No claim that one of *these* big bugs will look at. It struck me at first that you had rather a neat little case. I confess the look of it took hold of me —"

"Thanks to your liking so to please folks!"

Mr. Simmons appeared for a moment at odds with something; it proved to be with his liquor. "I rather think your beer's too good to be true," he said to the waiter. "I guess I'll take water. Come, old man," he resumed, "don't challenge me to the arts of debate, or you'll have me right down on you, and then you *will* feel me. My native sweetness, as I say, was part of it. The idea that if I put the thing through it would be a very pretty feather in my cap and a very pretty penny in my purse was part of it. And the satisfaction of seeing a horrid low American walk right into an old English estate was a good deal of it. Upon my word, Searle, when I think of it I wish with all my heart that, extravagant vain man as you are, I *could*, for the charm of it, put you through! I should hardly care what you did with the blamed place when you got it. I could leave you alone to turn it into Yankee notions — into ducks and drakes as they call 'em here. I should like to see you tearing round over it and kicking up its sacred dust in their very faces!"

"You don't know me one little bit," said Mr.

Searle, rather shirking, I thought, the burden of this tribute and for all response to the ambiguity of the compliment.

"I should be very glad to think I did n't, sir. I've been to no small amount of personal inconvenience for you. I've pushed my way right up to the head-spring. I've got the best opinion that's to be had. The best opinion that's to be had just gives you one leer over its spectacles. I guess that look will fix you if you ever get it straight. I've been able to tap, indirectly," Mr. Simmons went on, "the solicitor of your usurping cousin, and he evidently knows something to be in the wind. It seems your elder brother twenty years ago put out a feeler. So you're not to have the glory of even making them sit up."

"I never made any one sit up," I heard Mr. Searle plead. "I should n't begin at this time of day. I should approach the subject like a gentleman."

"Well, if you want very much to do something like a gentleman you've got a capital chance. Take your disappointment like a gentleman."

I had finished my dinner and had become keenly interested in poor Mr. Searle's unencouraging — or unencouraged — claim; so interested that I at last hated to hear his trouble reflected in his voice without being able — all respectfully! — to follow it in his face. I left my place, went over to the fire, took up the evening paper and established a post of observation behind it.

His cold counsellor was in the act of choosing a soft chop from the dish — an act accompanied by a great deal of prying and poking with that gentle-

man's own fork. My disillusioned compatriot had pushed away his plate; he sat with his elbows on the table, gloomily nursing his head with his hands. His companion watched him and then seemed to wonder — to do Mr. Simmons justice — how he could least ungracefully give him up. "I say, Searle," — and for my benefit, I think, taking me for a native ingenuous enough to be dazzled by his wit, he lifted his voice a little and gave it an ironical ring — "in this country it 's the inestimable privilege of a loyal citizen, under whatsoever stress of pleasure or of pain, to make a point of eating his dinner."

Mr. Searle gave his plate another push. "Anything may happen now. I don't care a straw."

"You ought to care. Have another chop and you *will* care. Have some better tipple. Take my advice!" Mr. Simmons went on.

My friend — I adopt that name for him — gazed from between his two hands coldly before him. "I 've had enough of your advice."

"A little more," said Simmons mildly; "I shan't trouble you again. What do you mean to do?"

"Nothing."

"Oh come!"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing!"

"Nothing but starve. How about meeting expenses?"

"Why do you ask?" said my friend. "You don't care."

"My dear fellow, if you want to make me offer you twenty pounds you set most clumsily about it. You said just now I don't know you," Mr. Simmons

went on. "Possibly. Come back with me then," he said kindly enough, "and let's improve our acquaintance."

"I won't go back. I shall never go back."

"Never?"

"Never."

Mr. Simmons thought it shrewdly over. "Well, you *are* sick!" he exclaimed presently. "All I can say is that if you're working out a plan for cold poison, or for any other act of desperation, you had better give it right up. You can't get a dose of the commonest kind of cold poison for nothing, you know. Look here, Searle" — and the worthy man made what struck me as a very decent appeal. "If you'll consent to return home with me by the steamer of the twenty-third I'll pay your passage down. More than that, I'll pay for your beer."

My poor gentleman met it. "I believe I never made up my mind to anything before, but I think it's made up now. I shall stay here till I take my departure for a newer world than any patched-up newness of ours. It's an odd feeling — I rather like it! What should I do at home?"

"You said just now you were homesick."

"I meant I was sick for a home. Don't I belong here? Haven't I longed to get here all my life? Haven't I counted the months and the years till I should be able to 'go' as we say? And now that I've 'gone,' that is that I've come, must I just back out? No, no, I'll move on. I'm much obliged to you for your offer. I've enough money for the present. I've about my person some forty pounds' worth of British

gold, and the same amount, say, of the toughness of the heaven-sent idiot. They'll see me through together! After they're gone I shall lay my head in some English churchyard, beside some ivied tower, beneath an old gnarled black yew."

I had so far distinctly followed the dialogue; but at this point the landlord entered and, begging my pardon, would suggest that number 12, a most superior apartment, having now been vacated, it would give him pleasure if I would look in. I declined to look in, but agreed for number 12 at a venture and gave myself again, with dissimulation, to my friends. They had got up; Simmons had put on his overcoat; he stood polishing his rusty black hat with his napkin. "Do you mean to go down to the place?" he asked.

"Possibly. I've thought of it so often that I should like to see it."

"Shall you call on Mr. Searle?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Something has just occurred to me," Simmons pursued with a grin that made his upper lip look more than ever denuded by the razor and jerked the ugly ornament of his chin into the air. "There's a certain Miss Searle, the old man's sister."

"Well?" my gentleman quavered.

"Well, sir! — you talk of moving on. You might move on the damsel."

Mr. Searle frowned in silence and his companion gave him a tap on the stomach. "Line those ribs a bit first!" He blushed crimson; his eyes filled with tears. "You *are* a coarse brute," he said. The scene quite harrowed me, but I was prevented from seeing it

through by the reappearance of the landlord on behalf of number 12. He represented to me that I ought in justice to him to come and see how tidy they *had* made it. Half an hour afterwards I was rattling along in a hansom toward Covent Garden, where I heard Madame Bosio in *The Barber of Seville.* On my return from the opera I went into the coffee-room; it had occurred to me I might catch there another glimpse of Mr. Searle. I was not disappointed. I found him seated before the fire with his head sunk on his breast: he slept, dreaming perhaps of Abijah Simmons. I watched him for some moments. His closed eyes, in the dim lamplight, looked even more helpless and resigned, and I seemed to see the fine grain of his nature in his unconscious mask. They say fortune comes while we sleep, and, standing there, I felt really tender enough — though otherwise most unqualified — to be poor Mr. Searle's fortune. As I walked away I noted in one of the little prandial pews I have described the melancholy waiter, whose whiskered chin also reposed on the bulge of his shirt-front. I lingered a moment beside the old inn-yard in which, upon a time, the coaches and post-chaises found space to turn and disgorge. Above the dusky shaft of the enclosing galleries, where lounging lodgers and crumpled chambermaids and all the picturesque domesticity of a rattling tavern must have leaned on their elbows for many a year, I made out the far-off lurid twinkle of the London constellations. At the foot of the stairs, enshrined in the glittering niche of her well-appointed bar, the landlady sat napping like some solemn idol amid votive brass and plate.

The next morning, not finding the subject of my benevolent curiosity in the coffee-room, I learned from the waiter that he had ordered breakfast in bed. Into this asylum I was not yet prepared to pursue him. I spent the morning in the streets, partly under pressure of business, but catching all kinds of romantic impressions by the way. To the searching American eye there is no tint of association with which the great grimy face of London does n't flush. As the afternoon approached, however, I began to yearn for some site more gracefully classic than what surrounded me, and, thinking over the excursions recommended to the ingenuous stranger, decided to take the train to Hampton Court. The day was the more propitious that it yielded just that dim subaqueous light which sleeps so fondly upon the English landscape.

At the end of an hour I found myself wandering through the apartments of the great palace. They follow each other in infinite succession, with no great variety of interest or aspect, but with persistent pomp and a fine specific effect. They are exactly of their various times. You pass from painted and panelled bedchambers and closets, anterooms, drawing-rooms, council-rooms, through king's suite, queen's suite, prince's suite, until you feel yourself move through the appointed hours and stages of some rigid monarchical day. On one side are the old monumental upholsteries, the big cold tarnished beds and canopies, with the circumference of disapparelled royalty symbolised by a gilded balustrade, and the great carved and yawning chimney-places where dukes-in-

waiting may have warmed their weary heels; on the other, in deep recesses, rise the immense windows, the framed and draped embrasures where the sovereign whispered and favourites smiled, looking out on terraced gardens and misty park. The brown walls are dimly illumined by innumerable portraits of courtiers and captains, more especially with various members of the Batavian *entourage* of William of Orange, the restorer of the palace; with good store too of the lily-bosomed models of Lely and Kneller. The whole tone of this processional interior is singularly stale and sad. The tints of all things have both faded and darkened — you taste the chill of the place as you walk from room to room. It was still early in the day and in the season, and I flattered myself that I was the only visitor. This complacency, however, dropped at sight of a person standing motionless before a simpering countess of Sir Peter Lely's creation. On hearing my footstep this victim of an evaporated spell turned his head and I recognised my fellow lodger of the Red Lion. I was apparently recognised as well; he looked as if he could scarce wait for me to be kind to him, and in fact did n't wait. Seeing I had a catalogue he asked the name of the portrait. On my satisfying him he appealed, rather timidly, as to my opinion of the lady.

"Well," said I, not quite timidly enough perhaps, "I confess she strikes me as no great matter."

He remained silent and was evidently a little abashed. As we strolled away he stole a sidelong glance of farewell at his leering shepherdess. To speak with him face to face was to feel keenly that he

was no less interesting than infirm. We talked of our inn, of London, of the palace; he uttered his mind freely, but seemed to struggle with a weight of depression. It was an honest mind enough, with no great cultivation but with a certain natural love of excellent things. I foresaw that I should find him quite to the manner born — to ours; full of glimpses and responses, of deserts and desolations. His perceptions would be fine and his opinions pathetic; I should moreover take refuge from his sense of proportion in his sense of humour, and then refuge from *that*, ah me! — in what? On my telling him that I was a fellow citizen he stopped short, deeply touched, and, silently passing his arm into my own, suffered me to lead him through the other apartments and down into the gardens. A large gravelled platform stretches itself before the basement of the palace, taking the afternoon sun. Parts of the great structure are reserved for private use and habitation, occupied by state-pensioners, reduced gentlewomen in receipt of the Queen's bounty and other deserving persons. Many of the apartments have their dependent gardens, and here and there, between the verdure-coated walls, you catch a glimpse of these somewhat stuffy bowers. My companion and I measured more than once this long expanse, looking down on the floral figures of the rest of the affair and on the stoutly-woven tapestry of creeping plants that muffle the foundations of the huge red pile. I thought of the various images of old-world gentility which, early and late, must have strolled in front of it and felt the protection and security of the place. We peeped

through an antique grating into one of the mossy cages and saw an old lady with a black mantilla on her head, a decanter of water in one hand and a crutch in the other, come forth, followed by three little dogs and a cat, to sprinkle a plant. She would probably have had an opinion on the virtue of Queen Caroline. Feeling these things together made us quickly, made us extraordinarily, intimate. My companion seemed to ache with his impression; he scowled, all gently, as if it gave him pain. I proposed at last that we should dine somewhere on the spot and take a late train to town. We made our way out of the gardens into the adjoining village, where we entered an inn which I pronounced, very sincerely, exactly what we wanted. Mr. Searle had approached our board as shyly as if it had been a cold bath; but, gradually warming to his work, he declared at the end of half an hour that for the first time in a month he enjoyed his victuals.

"I'm afraid you're rather out of health," I risked.

"Yes, sir — I'm an incurable."

The little village of Hampton Court stands clustered about the entrance of Bushey Park, and after we had dined we lounged along into the celebrated avenue of horse-chestnuts. There is a rare emotion, familiar to every intelligent traveller, in which the mind seems to swallow the sum total of its impressions at a gulp. You take in the whole place, whatever it be. You feel England, you feel Italy, and the sensation involves for the moment a kind of thrill. I had known it from time to time in Italy and had opened my soul to it as to the spirit of the Lord. Since my

landing in England I had been waiting for it to arrive. A bottle of tolerable Burgundy, at dinner, had perhaps unlocked to it the gates of sense; it arrived now with irresistible force. Just the scene around me was the England of one's early reveries. Over against us, amid the ripeness of its gardens, the dark red residence, with its formal facings and its vacant windows, seemed to make the past definite and massive; the little village, nestling between park and palace, around a patch of turfy common, with its taverns of figurative names, its ivy-towered church, its mossy roofs, looked like the property of a feudal lord. It was in this dark composite light that I had read the British classics; it was this mild moist air that had blown from the pages of the poets; while I seemed to feel the buried generations in the dense and elastic sod. And that I must have testified in some form or other to what I have called my thrill I gather, remembering it, from a remark of my companion's.

"You've the advantage over me in coming to all this with an educated eye. You already know what old things can be. I've never known it but by report. I've always fancied I should like it. In a small way at home, of course, I did try to stand by my idea of it. I must be a conservative by nature. People at home used to call me a cockney and a fribble. But it was n't true," he went on; "if it had been I should have made my way over here long ago: before — before —" He paused, and his head dropped sadly on his breast.

The bottle of Burgundy had loosened his tongue; I had but to choose my time for learning his story.

Something told me that I had gained his confidence and that, so far as attention and attitude might go, I was "in" for responsibilities. But somehow I did n't dread them. "Before you lost your health," I suggested.

"Before I lost my health," he answered. "And my property — the little I had. And my ambition. And any power to take myself seriously."

"Come!" I cried. "You shall recover everything. This tonic English climate will wind you up in a month. And *then* see how you 'll take yourself — and how I shall take you!"

"Oh," he gratefully smiled, "I may turn to dust in your hands! I should like," he presently pursued, "to be an old genteel pensioner, lodged over there in the palace and spending my days in maundering about these vistas. I should go every morning, at the hour when it gets the sun, into that long gallery where all those pretty women of Lely's are hung — I know you despise them! — and stroll up and down and say something kind to them. Poor precious forsaken creatures! So flattered and courted in their day, so neglected now! Offering up their shoulders and ringlets and smiles to that musty deadly silence!"

I laid my hand on my friend's shoulder. "Oh sir, you 're all right!"

Just at this moment there came cantering down the shallow glade of the avenue a young girl on a fine black horse — one of those little budding gentlewomen, perfectly mounted and equipped, who form to alien eyes one of the prettiest incidents of English scenery. She had distanced her servant and, as she

came abreast of us, turned slightly in her saddle and glanced back at him. In the movement she dropped the hunting-crop with which she was armed; whereupon she reined up and looked shyly at us and at the implement. "This is something better than a Lely," I said. Searle hastened forward, picked up the crop and, with a particular courtesy that became him, handed it back to the rider. Fluttered and blushing she reached forward, took it with a quick sweet sound, and the next moment was bounding over the quiet turf. Searle stood watching her; the servant, as he passed us, touched his hat. When my friend turned toward me again I saw that he too was blushing. "Oh sir, you're all right," I repeated.

At a short distance from where we had stopped was an old stone bench. We went and sat down on it and, as the sun began to sink, watched the light mist powder itself with gold. "We ought to be thinking of the train back to London, I suppose," I at last said.

"Oh hang the train!" sighed my companion.

"Willingly. There could be no better spot than this to feel the English evening stand still." So we lingered, and the twilight hung about us, strangely clear in spite of the thickness of the air. As we sat there came into view an apparition unmistakeable from afar as an immemorial vagrant — the disowned, in his own rich way, of all the English ages. As he approached us he slackened pace and finally halted, touching his cap. He was a man of middle age, clad in a greasy bonnet with false-looking ear-locks depending from its sides. Round his neck was a grimy red scarf, tucked into his waistcoat; his coat and

trousers had a remote affinity with those of a reduced hostler. In one hand he had a stick; on his arm he bore a tattered basket, with a handful of withered vegetables at the bottom. His face was pale haggard and degraded beyond description — as base as a counterfeit coin, yet as modelled somehow as a tragic mask. He too, like everything else, had a history. From what height had he fallen, from what depth had he risen? He was the perfect symbol of generated constituted baseness; and I felt before him in presence of a great artist or actor.

"For God's sake, gentlemen," he said in the raucous tone of weather-beaten poverty, the tone of chronic sore-throat exacerbated by perpetual gin, "for God's sake, gentlemen, have pity on a poor fern-collector!" — turning up his stale daisies. "Food has n't passed my lips, gentlemen, for the last three days."

We gaped at him and at each other, and to our imagination his appeal had almost the force of a command. "I wonder if half-a-crown would help?" I privately wailed. And our fasting botanist went limping away through the park with the grace of controlled stupefaction still further enriching his outline.

"I feel as if I had seen my *Doppelgänger*," said Searle. "He reminds me of myself. What am I but a mere figure in the landscape, a wandering minstrel or picker of daisies?"

"What are you 'anyway,' my friend?" I thereupon took occasion to ask. "Who are you? kindly tell me."

The colour rose again to his pale face and I feared I had offended him. He poked a moment at the sod with the point of his umbrella before answering. "Who am I?" he said at last. "My name is Clement Searle. I was born in New York, and that's the beginning and the end of me."

"Ah not the end!" I made bold to plead.

"Then it's because I *have* no end — any more than an ill-written book. I just stop anywhere; which means I'm a failure," the poor man all lucidly and unreservedly pursued: "a failure, as hopeless and helpless, sir, as any that ever swallowed up the slender investments of the widow and the orphan. I don't pay five cents on the dollar. What I might have been — once! — there's nothing left to show. I was rotten before I was ripe. To begin with, certainly, I was n't a fountain of wisdom. All the more reason for a definite channel — for having a little character and purpose. But I had n't even a little. I had nothing but nice tastes, as they call them, and fine sympathies and sentiments. Take a turn through New York to-day and you'll find the tattered remnants of these things dangling on every bush and fluttering in every breeze; the men to whom I lent money, the women to whom I made love, the friends I trusted, the follies I invented, the poisonous fumes of pleasure amid which nothing was worth a thought but the manhood they stifled! It was my fault that I believed in pleasure here below. I believe in it still, but as I believe in the immortality of the soul. The soul is immortal, certainly — if you've got one; but most people have n't. Pleasure would be right if it were pleasure straight

through; but it never is. My taste was to be the best in the world; well, perhaps it was. I had a little money; it went the way of my little wit. Here in my pocket I have the scant dregs of it. I should tell you I was the biggest kind of ass. Just now that description would flatter me; it would assume there's something left of me. But the ghost of a donkey — what's that? I think," he went on with a charming turn and as if striking off his real explanation, "I should have been all right in a world arranged on different lines. Before heaven, sir — whoever you are — I'm in practice so absurdly tender-hearted that I can afford to say it: I entered upon life a perfect gentleman. I had the love of old forms and pleasant rites, and I found them nowhere — found a world all hard lines and harsh lights, without shade, without composition, as they say of pictures, without the lovely mystery of colour. To furnish colour I melted down the very substance of my own soul. I went about with my brush, touching up and toning down; a very pretty chiaroscuro you'll find in my track! Sitting here in this old park, in this old country, I feel that I hover on the misty verge of what might have been! I should have been born here and not there; here my makeshift distinctions would have found things they'd have been true of. How it was I never got free is more than I can say. It might have cut the knot, but the knot was too tight. I was always out of health or in debt or somehow desperately dangling. Besides, I had a horror of the great black sickening sea. A year ago I was reminded of the existence of an old claim to an English estate, which has danced before the eyes of

my family, at odd moments, any time these eighty years. I confess it 's a bit of a muddle and a tangle, and am by no means sure that to this hour I 've got the hang of it. You look as if you had a clear head: some other time, if you consent, we 'll have a go at it, such as it is, together. Poverty was staring me in the face; I sat down and tried to commit the 'points' of our case to memory, as I used to get nine-times-nine by heart as a boy. I dreamed of it for six months, half-expecting to wake up some fine morning and hear through a latticed casement the cawing of an English rookery. A couple of months ago there came out to England on business of his own a man who once got me out of a dreadful mess (not that I had hurt any one but myself), a legal practitioner in our courts, a very rough diamond, but with a great deal of *flair*, as they say in New York. It was with him yesterday you saw me dining. He undertook, as he called it, to 'nose round' and see if anything could be made of our questionable but possible show. The matter had never seriously been taken up. A month later I got a letter from Simmons assuring me that it seemed a very good show indeed and that he should be greatly surprised if I were unable to do something. This was the greatest push I had ever got in my life; I took a deliberate step, for the first time; I sailed for England. I 've been here three days: they 've seemed three months. After keeping me waiting for thirty-six hours my legal adviser makes his appearance last night and states to me, with his mouth full of mutton, that I have n't a leg to stand on, that my claim is moonshine, and that I must do penance and take a

ticket for six more days of purgatory with his presence thrown in. My friend, my friend — shall I say I was disappointed? I'm already resigned. I did n't really believe I had any case. I felt in my deeper consciousness that it was the crowning illusion of a life of illusions. Well, it was a pretty one. Poor legal adviser! — I forgive him with all my heart. But for him I should n't be sitting in this place, in this air, under these impressions. This is a world I could have got on with beautifully. There's an immense charm in its having been kept for the last. After it nothing else would have been tolerable. I shall now have a month of it, I hope, which won't be long enough for it to "go back" on me. There's one thing!" — and here, pausing, he laid his hand on mine; I rose and stood before him — "I wish it were possible you should be with me to the end."

"I promise you to leave you only when you kick me downstairs." But I suggested my terms. "It must be on condition of your omitting from your conversation this intolerable flavour of mortality. I know nothing of 'ends.' I'm all for beginnings."

He kept on me his sad weak eyes. Then with a faint smile: "Don't cut down a man you find hanging. He has had a reason for it. I'm bankrupt."

"Oh health's money!" I said. "Get well, and the rest will take care of itself. I'm interested in your questionable claim — it's the question that's the charm; and pretenders, to anything big enough, have always been, for me, an attractive class. Only their first duty's to be gallant."

"Their first duty's to understand their own points

and to know their own mind," he returned with hopeless lucidity. "Don't ask me to climb our family tree now," he added; "I fear I have n't the head for it. I'll try some day — if it will bear my weight; or yours added to mine. There's no doubt, however, that we, as they say, go back. But I know nothing of business. If I were to take the matter in hand I should break in two the poor little silken thread from which everything hangs. In a better world than this I think I should be listened to. But the wind does n't set to ideal justice. There's no doubt that a hundred years ago we suffered a palpable wrong. Yet we made no appeal at the time, and the dust of a century now lies heaped upon our silence. Let it rest!"

"What then," I asked, "is the estimated value of your interest?"

"We were instructed from the first to accept a compromise. Compared with the whole property our ideas have been small. We were once advised in the sense of a hundred and thirty thousand dollars. Why a hundred and thirty I'm sure I don't know. Don't beguile me into figures."

"Allow me one more question," I said. "Who's actually in possession?"

"A certain Mr. Richard Searle. I know nothing about him."

"He's in some way related to you?"

"Our great-grandfathers were half-brothers. What does that make us?"

"Twentieth cousins, say. And where does your twentieth cousin live?"

"At a place called Lackley — in Middleshire."

I thought it over. "Well, suppose we look up Lackley in Middleshire!"

He got straight up. "Go and see it?"

"Go and see it."

"Well," he said, "with you I'll go anywhere."

On our return to town we determined to spend three days there together and then proceed to our errand. We were as conscious one as the other of that deeper mystic appeal made by London to those superstitious pilgrims who feel it the mother-city of their race, the distributing heart of their traditional life. Certain characteristics of the dusky Babylon, certain aspects, phases, features, "say" more to the American spiritual ear than anything else in Europe. The influence of these things on Searle it charmed me to note. His observation I soon saw to be, as I pronounced it to him, searching and caressing. His almost morbid appetite for any over-scoring of time, well-nigh extinct from long inanition, threw the flush of its revival into his face and his talk.

II

We looked out the topography of Middleshire in a county-guide, which spoke highly, as the phrase is, of Lackley Park, and took up our abode, our journey ended, at a wayside inn where, in the days of leisure, the coach must have stopped for luncheon and burnished pewters of rustic ale been handed up as straight as possible to outsiders athirst with the sense of speed. We stopped here for mere gaping joy of its steep-thatched roof, its latticed windows, its hospitable porch, and allowed a couple of days to elapse in vague undirected strolls and sweet sentimental observance of the land before approaching the particular business that had drawn us on. The region I allude to is a compendium of the general physiognomy of England. The noble friendliness of the scenery, its latent old-friendliness, the way we scarcely knew whether we were looking at it for the first or the last time, made it arrest us at every step. The countryside, in the full warm rains of the last of April, had burst into sudden perfect spring. The dark walls of the hedgerows had turned into blooming screens, the sodden verdure of lawn and meadow been washed over with a lighter brush. We went forth without loss of time for a long walk on the great grassy hills, smooth arrested central billows of some primitive upheaval, from the summits of which you find half England unrolled at your feet. A dozen broad counties, within the

scope of your vision, commingle their green exhalations. Closely beneath us lay the dark rich hedgy flats and the copse-chequered slopes, white with the blossom of apples. At widely opposite points of the expanse two great towers of cathedrals rose sharply out of a reddish blur of habitation, taking the mild English light.

We gave an irrepressible attention to this same solar reserve, and found in it only a refinement of art. The sky never was empty and never idle; the clouds were continually at play for our benefit. Over against us, from our station on the hills, we saw them piled and dissolved, condensed and shifted, blotting the blue with sullen rain-spots, stretching, breeze-fretted, into dappled fields of grey, bursting into an explosion of light or melting into a drizzle of silver. We made our way along the rounded ridge of the downs and reached, by a descent, through slanting angular fields, green to cottage-doors, a russet village that beckoned us from the heart of the maze in which the hedges wrapped it up. Close beside it, I admit, the roaring train bounces out of a hole in the hills; yet there broods upon this charming hamlet an old-time quietude that makes a violation of confidence of naming it so far away. We struck through a narrow lane, a green lane, dim with its barriers of hawthorn; it led us to a superb old farmhouse, now rather rudely jostled by the multiplied roads and by-ways that have reduced its ancient appanage. It stands there in stubborn picturesqueness, doggedly submitting to be pointed out and sketched. It is a wonderful image of the domiciliary conditions of the past — cruelly

complete; with bended beams and joists, beneath the burden of gables, that seem to ache and groan with memories and regrets. The short low windows, where lead and glass combine equally to create an inward gloom, retain their opacity as a part of the primitive idea of defence. Such an old house provokes on the part of an American a luxury of respect. So propped and patched, so tinkered with clumsy tenderness, clustered so richly about its central English sturdiness, its oaken vertebrations, so humanised with ages of use and touches of beneficent affection, it seemed to offer to our grateful eyes a small rude symbol of the great English social order. Passing out upon the highroad, we came to the common browsing-patch, the "village-green" of the tales of our youth. Nothing was absent: the shaggy mouse-coloured donkey, nosing the turf with his mild and huge proboscis, the geese, the old woman — *the* old woman, in person, with her red cloak and her black bonnet, frilled about the face and double-frilled beside her decent placid cheeks — the towering ploughman with his white smock-frock puckered on chest and back, his short corduroys, his mighty calves, his big red rural face. We greeted these things as children greet the loved pictures in a story-book lost and mourned and found again. We recognised them as one recognises the handwriting on letter-backs. Beside the road we saw a ploughboy straddle whistling on a stile, and he had the merit of being not only a ploughboy but a Gainsborough. Beyond the stile, across the level velvet of a meadow, a footpath wandered like a streak drawn by a finger over a surface of fine plush. We followed it from field

to field and from stile to stile; it was all adorably the way to church. At the church we finally arrived, lost in its rook-haunted churchyard, hidden from the work-day world by the broad stillness of pastures — a grey, grey tower, a huge black yew, a cluster of village-graves with crooked headstones and protrusions that had settled and sunk. The place seemed so to ache with consecration that my sensitive companion gave way to the force of it.

"You must bury me here, you know" — he caught at my arm. "It's the first place of worship I've seen in my life. How it makes a Sunday where it stands!"

It took the Church, we agreed, to make churches, but we had the sense the next day of seeing still better why. We walked over, some seven miles, to the nearer of the two neighbouring seats of that lesson; and all through such a mist of local colour that we felt ourselves a pair of Smollett's pedestrian heroes faring tavernward for a night of adventures. As we neared the provincial city we saw the steepled mass of the cathedral, long and high, rise far into the cloud-freckled blue; and as we got closer stopped on a bridge and looked down at the reflexion of the solid minster in a yellow stream. Going further yet we entered the russet town — where surely Miss Austen's heroines, in chariots and curricles, must often have come a-shopping for their sandals and mittens; we lounged in the grassed and gravelled precinct and gazed insatiably at that most soul-soothing sight, the waning wasting afternoon light, the visible ether that feels the voices of the chimes cling far aloft to the quiet sides of the cathedral-tower; saw it linger and

nestle and abide, as it loves to do on all perpendicular spaces, converting them irresistibly into registers and dials; tasted too, as deeply, of the peculiar stillness of this place of priests; saw a rosy English lad come forth and lock the door of the old foundation-school that dovetailed with cloister and choir, and carry his big responsible key into one of the quiet canonical houses: and then stood musing together on the effect on one's mind of having in one's boyhood gone and come through cathedral-shades as a King's scholar, and yet kept ruddy with much cricket in misty river meadows. On the third morning we betook ourselves to Lackley, having learned that parts of the "grounds" were open to visitors, and that indeed on application the house was sometimes shown.

Within the range of these numerous acres the declining spurs of the hills continued to undulate and subside. A long avenue wound and circled from the outermost gate through an untrimmed woodland, whence you glanced at further slopes and glades and copses and bosky recesses — at everything except the limits of the place. It was as free and untended as I had found a few of the large loose villas of old Italy, and I was still never to see the angular fact of English landlordism muffle itself in so many concessions. The weather had just become perfect; it was one of the dozen exquisite days of the English year — days stamped with a purity unknown in climates where fine weather is cheap. It was as if the mellow brightness, as tender as that of the primroses which starred the dark waysides like petals wind-scattered

over beds of moss, had been meted out to us by the cubic foot — distilled from an alchemist's crucible. From this pastoral abundance we moved upon the more composed scene, the park proper — passed through a second lodge-gate, with weather-worn gilding on its twisted bars, to the smooth slopes where the great trees stood singly and the tame deer browsed along the bed of a woodland stream. Here before us rose the gabled grey front of the Tudor-time, developed and terraced and gardened to some later loss, as we were afterwards to know, of type.

"Here you can wander all day," I said to Searle, "like an exiled prince who has come back on tiptoe and hovers about the dominion of the usurper."

"To think of 'others' having hugged this all these years!" he answered. "I know what I am, but what might I have been? What do such places make of a man?"

"I dare say he gets stupidly used to them," I said. "But I dare say too, even then, that when you scratch the mere owner you find the perfect lover."

"What a perfect scene and background it forms!" my friend, however, had meanwhile gone on. "What legends, what histories it knows! My heart really breaks with all I seem to guess. There's Tennyson's Talking Oak! What summer days one could spend here! How I could lounge the rest of my life away on this turf of the middle ages! Have n't I some maiden-cousin in that old hall, or grange, or court — what in the name of enchantment do you call the thing? — who would give me kind leave?" And then he turned almost fiercely upon me. "Why did you bring me

here? Why did you drag me into this distraction of vain regrets?"

At this moment there passed within call a decent lad who had emerged from the gardens and who might have been an underling in the stables. I hailed him and put the question of our possible admittance to the house. He answered that the master was away from home, but that he thought it probable the housekeeper would consent to do the honours. I passed my arm into Searle's. "Come," I said; "drain the cup, bitter-sweet though it be. We must go in." We hastened slowly and approached the fine front. The house was one of the happiest fruits of its freshly-feeling era, a multitudinous cluster of fair gables and intricate chimneys, brave projections and quiet recesses, brown old surfaces weathered to silver and mottled roofs that testified not to seasons but to centuries. Two broad terraces commanded the wooded horizon. Our appeal was answered by a butler who condescended to our weakness. He renewed the assertion that Mr. Searle was away from home, but he would himself lay our case before the housekeeper. We would be so good, however, as to give him our cards. This request, following so directly on the assertion that Mr. Searle was absent, was rather resented by my companion. "Surely not for the housekeeper."

The butler gave a diplomatic cough. "Miss Searle is at home, sir."

"Yours alone will have to serve," said my friend. I took out a card and pencil and wrote beneath my name *New York*. As I stood with the pencil poised

a temptation entered into it. Without in the least considering proprieties or results I let my implement yield — I added above my name that of Mr. Clement Searle. What would come of it?

Before many minutes the housekeeper waited upon us — a fresh rosy little old woman in a clean dowdy cap and a scanty sprigged gown; a quaint careful person, but accessible to the tribute of our pleasure, to say nothing of any other. She had the accent of the country, but the manners of the house. Under her guidance we passed through a dozen apartments, duly stocked with old pictures, old tapestry, old carvings, old armour, with a hundred ornaments and treasures. The pictures were especially valuable. The two Vandykes, the trio of rosy Rubenses, the sole and sombre Rembrandt, glowed with conscious authenticity. A Claude, a Murillo, a Greuze, a couple of Gainsboroughs, hung there with high complacency. Searle strolled about, scarcely speaking, pale and grave, with bloodshot eyes and lips compressed. He uttered no comment on what we saw — he asked but a question or two. Missing him at last from my side I retraced my steps and found him in a room we had just left, on a faded old ottoman and with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands. Before him, ranged on a great *crédence*, was a magnificent collection of old Italian majolica; plates of every shape, with their glaze of happy colour, jugs and vases nobly bellied and embossed. There seemed to rise before me, as I looked, a sudden vision of the young English gentleman who, eighty years ago, had travelled by slow stages to Italy and been

waited on at his inn by persuasive toymen. "What is it, my dear man?" I asked. "Are you unwell?"

He uncovered his haggard face and showed me the flush of a consciousness sharper, I think, to myself than to him. "A memory of the past! There comes back to me a china vase that used to stand on the parlour mantel-shelf when I was a boy, with a portrait of General Jackson painted on one side and a bunch of flowers on the other. How long do you suppose that majolica has been in the family?"

"A long time probably. It was brought hither in the last century, into old, old England, out of old, old Italy, by some contemporary dandy with a taste for foreign gimcracks. Here it has stood for a hundred years, keeping its clear firm hues in this quiet light that has never sought to advertise it."

Searle sprang to his feet. "I say, for mercy's sake, take me away! I can't stand this sort of thing. Before I know it I shall do something scandalous. I shall steal some of their infernal crockery. I shall proclaim my identity and assert my rights. I shall go blubbering to Miss Searle and ask her in pity's name to 'put me up.'"

If he could ever have been said to threaten complications he rather visibly did so now. I began to regret my officious presentation of his name and prepared without delay to lead him out of the house. We overtook the housekeeper in the last room of the series, a small unused boudoir over whose chimney-piece hung a portrait of a young man in a powdered wig and a brocaded waistcoat. I was struck with his resemblance to my companion while our guide intro-

duced him. "This is Mr. Clement Searle, Mr. Searle's great-uncle, by Sir Joshua Reynolds. He died young, poor gentleman; he perished at sea, going to America."

"He was the young buck who brought the majolica out of Italy," I supplemented.

"Indeed, sir, I believe he did," said the housekeeper without wonder.

"He's the image of you, my dear Searle," I further observed.

"He's remarkably like the gentleman, saving his presence," said the housekeeper.

My friend stood staring. "Clement Searle — at sea — going to America — ?" he broke out. Then with some sharpness to our old woman: "Why the devil did he go to America?"

"Why indeed, sir? You may well ask. I believe he had kinsfolk there. It was for them to come to him."

Searle broke into a laugh. "It was for them to come to him! Well, well," he said, fixing his eyes on our guide, "they've come to him at last!"

She blushed like a wrinkled rose-leaf. "Indeed, sir, I verily believe you're one of *us!*"

"My name's the name of that beautiful youth," Searle went on. "Dear kinsman, I'm happy to meet you! And what do you think of this?" he pursued as he grasped me by the arm. "I have an idea. He perished at sea. His spirit came ashore and wandered about in misery till it got another incarnation — in this poor trunk!" And he tapped his hollow chest. "Here it has rattled about these forty years, beating its wings against its rickety cage, begging to be taken

home again. And I never knew what was the matter with me! Now at last the bruised spirit can escape!"

Our old lady gaped at a breadth of appreciation — if not at the disclosure of a connexion — beyond her. The scene was really embarrassing, and my confusion increased as we became aware of another presence. A lady had appeared in the doorway and the housekeeper dropped just audibly: "Miss Searle!" My first impression of Miss Searle was that she was neither young nor beautiful. She stood without confidence on the threshold, pale, trying to smile and twirling my card in her fingers. I immediately bowed. Searle stared at her as if one of the pictures had stepped out of its frame.

"If I'm not mistaken one of you gentlemen is Mr. Clement Searle," the lady adventured.

"My friend's Mr. Clement Searle," I took upon myself to reply. "Allow me to add that I alone am responsible for your having received his name."

"I should have been sorry not to — not to see him," said Miss Searle, beginning to blush. "Your being from America has led me — perhaps to intrude!"

"The intrusion, madam, has been on our part. And with just that excuse — that we come from so far away."

Miss Searle, while I spoke, had fixed her eyes on my friend as he stood silent beneath Sir Joshua's portrait. The housekeeper, agitated and mystified, fairly let herself go. "Heaven preserve us, Miss! It's your great-uncle's picture come to life."

"I'm not mistaken then," said Miss Searle — "we must be distantly related." She had the air of the

shyest of women, for whom it was almost anguish to make an advance without help. Searle eyed her with gentle wonder from head to foot, and I could easily read his thoughts. This then was his maiden-cousin, prospective mistress of these hereditary treasures. She was of some thirty-five years of age, taller than was then common and perhaps stouter than is now enjoined. She had small kind grey eyes, a considerable quantity of very light-brown hair and a smiling well-formed mouth. She was dressed in a lustreless black satin gown with a short train. Disposed about her neck was a blue handkerchief, and over this handkerchief, in many convolutions, a string of amber beads. Her appearance was singular; she was large yet somehow vague, mature yet undeveloped. Her manner of addressing us spoke of all sorts of deep diffidences. Searle, I think, had prefigured to himself some proud cold beauty of five-and-twenty; he was relieved at finding the lady timid and not obtrusively fair. He at once had an excellent tone.

"We're distant cousins, I believe. I'm happy to claim a relationship which you're so good as to remember. I had n't counted on your knowing anything about me."

"Perhaps I've done wrong." And Miss Searle blushed and smiled anew. "But I've always known of there being people of our blood in America, and have often wondered and asked about them — without ever learning much. To-day, when this card was brought me and I understood a Clement Searle to be under our roof as a stranger, I felt I ought to do something. But, you know, I hardly knew what. My

brother's in London. I've done what I think he would have done. Welcome as a cousin." And with a resolution that ceased to be awkward she put out her hand.

"I'm welcome indeed if he would have done it half so graciously!" Again Searle, taking her hand, acquitted himself beautifully.

"You've seen what there is, I think," Miss Searle went on. "Perhaps now you'll have luncheon." We followed her into a small breakfast-room where a deep bay window opened on the mossy flags of a terrace. Here, for some moments, she remained dumb and abashed, as if resting from a measurable effort. Searle too had ceased to overflow, so that I had to relieve the silence. It was of course easy to descant on the beauties of park and mansion, and as I did so I observed our hostess. She had no arts, no impulses nor graces — scarce even any manners; she was queerly, almost frowsily dressed; yet she pleased me well. She had an antique sweetness, a homely fragrance of old traditions. To be so simple, among those complicated treasures, so pampered and yet so fresh, so modest and yet so placid, told of just the spacious leisure in which Searle and I had imagined human life to be steeped in such places as that. This figure was to the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood what a fact is to a fairy-tale, an interpretation to a myth. We, on our side, were to our hostess subjects of a curiosity not cunningly veiled.

"I should like so to go abroad!" she exclaimed suddenly, as if she meant us to take the speech for an expression of interest in ourselves.

"Have you never been?" one of us asked.

"Only once. Three years ago my brother took me to Switzerland. We thought it extremely beautiful. Except for that journey I've always lived here. I was born in this house. It's a dear old place indeed, and I know it well. Sometimes one wants a change." And on my asking her how she spent her time and what society she saw, "Of course it's very quiet," she went on, proceeding by short steps and simple statements, in the manner of a person called upon for the first time to analyse to that extent her situation. "We see very few people. I don't think there are many nice ones hereabouts. At least we don't know them. Our own family's very small. My brother cares for nothing but riding and books. He had a great sorrow ten years ago. He lost his wife and his only son, a dear little boy, who of course would have had everything. Do you know that that makes me the heir, as they 've done something — I don't quite know what — to the entail? Poor old me! Since his loss my brother has preferred to be quite alone. I'm sorry he's away. But you must wait till he comes back. I expect him in a day or two." She talked more and more, as if our very strangeness led her on, about her circumstances, her solitude, her bad eyes, so that she could n't read, her flowers, her ferns, her dogs, and the vicar, recently presented to the living by her brother and warranted quite safe, who had lately begun to light his altar candles; pausing every now and then to gasp in self-surprise, yet, in the quaintest way in the world, keeping up her story as if it were a slow rather awkward old-time dance, a difficult *pas seul* in

which she would have been better with more practice, but of which she must complete the figure. Of all the old things I had seen in England this exhibited mind of Miss Searle's seemed to me the oldest, the most handed down and taken for granted; fenced and protected as it was by convention and precedent and usage, thoroughly acquainted with its subordinate place. I felt as if I were talking with the heroine of a last-century novel. As she talked she rested her dull eyes on her kinsman with wondering kindness. At last she put it to him: "Did you mean to go away without asking for us?"

"I had thought it over, Miss Searle, and had determined not to trouble you. You've shown me how unfriendly I should have been."

"But you knew of the place being ours, and of our relationship?"

"Just so. It was because of these things that I came down here — because of them almost that I came to England. I've always liked to think of them," said my companion.

"You merely wished to look then? We don't pretend to be much to look at."

He waited; her words were too strange. "You don't know what you are, Miss Searle."

"You like the old place then?"

Searle looked at her again in silence. "If I could only tell you!" he said at last.

"Do tell me. You must come and stay with us."

It moved him to an oddity of mirth. "Take care, take care — I should surprise you! I'm afraid I should bore you. I should never leave you."

"Oh you'd get homesick — for your real home!"

At this he was still more amused. "By the way, tell Miss Searle about our real home," he said to me. And he stepped, through the window, out upon the terrace, followed by two beautiful dogs, a setter and a young stag-hound who from the moment we came in had established the fondest relation with him. Miss Searle looked at him, while he went, as if she vaguely yearned over him; it began to be plain that she was interested in her exotic cousin. I suddenly recalled the last words I had heard spoken by my friend's adviser in London and which, in a very crude form, had reference to his making a match with this lady. If only Miss Searle could be induced to think of that, and if one had but the tact to put it in a light to her! Something assured me that her heart was virgin-soil, that the flower of romantic affection had never bloomed there. If I might just sow the seed! There seemed to shape itself within her the perfect image of one of the patient wives of old.

"He has lost his heart to England," I said. "He ought to have been born here."

"And yet he does n't look in the least an Englishman," she still rather guardedly prosed.

"Oh it is n't his looks, poor fellow."

"Of course looks are n't everything. I never talked with a foreigner before; but he talks as I have fancied foreigners."

"Yes, he's foreign enough."

"Is he married?"

"His wife's dead and he's all alone in the world."

"Has he much property?"

"None to speak of."

"But he has means to travel."

I meditated. "He has not expected to travel far," I said at last. "You know, he's in very poor health."

"Poor gentleman! So I supposed."

"But there's more of him to go on with than he thinks. He came here because he wanted to see your place before he dies."

"Dear me — kind man!" And I imagined in the quiet eyes the hint of a possible tear. "And he was going away without my seeing him?"

"He's very modest, you see."

"He's very much the gentleman."

I could n't but smile. "He's *all*—!"

At this moment we heard on the terrace a loud harsh cry. "It's the great peacock!" said Miss Searle, stepping to the window and passing out while I followed her. Below us, leaning on the parapet, stood our appreciative friend with his arm round the neck of the setter. Before him on the grand walk strutted the familiar fowl of gardens — a splendid specimen — with ruffled neck and expanded tail. The other dog had apparently indulged in a momentary attempt to abash the gorgeous biped, but at Searle's summons had bounded back to the terrace and leaped upon the ledge, where he now stood licking his new friend's face. The scene had a beautiful old-time air: the peacock flaunting in the foreground like the genius of stately places; the broad terrace, which flattered an innate taste of mine for all deserted walks where people may have sat after heavy dinners to drink coffee in old Sèvres and where the stiff brocade of

women's dresses may have rustled over grass or gravel; and far around us, with one leafy circle melting into another, the timbered acres of the park. "The very beasts have made him welcome," I noted as we rejoined our companion.

"The peacock has done for you, Mr. Searle," said his cousin, "what he does only for very great people. A year ago there came here a great person — a grand old lady — to see my brother. I don't think that since then he has spread his tail as wide for any one else — not by a dozen feathers."

"It's not alone the peacock," said Searle. "Just now there came slipping across my path a little green lizard, the first I ever saw, the lizard of literature! And if you've a ghost, broad daylight though it be, I expect to see him here. Do you know the annals of your house, Miss Searle?"

"Oh dear, no! You must ask my brother for all those things."

"You ought to have a collection of legends and traditions. You ought to have loves and murders and mysteries by the roomful. I shall be ashamed of you if you have n't."

"Oh Mr. Searle! We've always been a very well-behaved family," she quite seriously pleaded. "Nothing out of the way has ever happened, I think."

"Nothing out of the way? Oh that won't do! We've managed better than that in America. Why I myself!" — and he looked at her ruefully enough, but enjoying too his idea that he might embody the social scandal or point to the darkest drama of the Searles. "Suppose I should turn out a better Searle

than you — better than you nursed here in romance and extravagance? Come, don't disappoint me. You've some history among you all, you've some poetry, you've some accumulation of legend. I've been famished all my days for these things. Don't you understand? Ah you can't understand! Tell me," he rambled on, "something tremendous. When I think of what must have happened here; of the lovers who must have strolled on this terrace and wandered under the beeches, of all the figures and passions and purposes that must have haunted these walls! When I think of the births and deaths, the joys and sufferings, the young hopes and the old regrets, the rich experience of life —!" He faltered a moment with the increase of his agitation. His humour of dismay at a threat of the commonplace in the history he felt about him had turned to a deeper reaction. I began to fear however that he was really losing his head. He went on with a wilder play. "To see it all called up there before me, if the Devil alone could do it I'd make a bargain with the Devil! Ah Miss Searle," he cried, "I'm a most unhappy man!"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she almost wailed while I turned half away.

"Look at that window, that dear little window!" I turned back to see him point to a small protruding oriel, above us, relieved against the purple brickwork, framed in chiselled stone and curtained with ivy.

"It's my little room," she said.

"Of course it's a woman's room. Think of all the dear faces — all of them so mild and yet so proud — that have looked out of that lattice, and of all the old-

time women's lives whose principal view of the world has been this quiet park! Every one of them was a cousin of mine. And you, dear lady, you're one of them yet." With which he marched toward her and took her large white hand. She surrendered it, blushing to her eyes and pressing her other hand to her breast. "You're a woman of the past. You're nobly simple. It has been a romance to see you. It does n't matter what I say to you. You did n't know me yesterday, you'll not know me to-morrow. Let me to-day do a mad sweet thing. Let me imagine in you the spirit of all the dead women who have trod the terrace-flags that lie here like sepulchral tablets in the pavement of a church. Let me say I delight in you!" — he raised her hand to his lips. She gently withdrew it and for a moment averted her face. Meeting her eyes the next instant I saw the tears had come. The Sleeping Beauty was awake.

There followed an embarrassed pause. An issue was suddenly presented by the appearance of the butler bearing a letter. "A telegram, Miss," he announced.

"Oh what shall I do?" cried Miss Searle. "I can't open a telegram. Cousin, help me."

Searle took the missive, opened it and read aloud: "*I shall be home to dinner. Keep the American.*"

III

"KEEP the American!" Miss Searle, in compliance with the injunction conveyed in her brother's telegram (with something certainly of telegraphic curtness), lost no time in expressing the pleasure it would give her that our friend should remain. "Really you must," she said; and forthwith repaired to the housekeeper to give orders for the preparation of a room.

"But how in the world did he know of my being here?" my companion put to me.

I answered that he had probably heard from his solicitor of the other's visit. "Mr. Simmons and that gentleman must have had another interview since your arrival in England. Simmons, for reasons of his own, has made known to him your journey to this neighbourhood, and Mr. Searle, learning this, has immediately taken for granted that you've formally presented yourself to his sister. He's hospitably inclined and wishes her to do the proper thing by you. There may even," I went on, "be more in it than that. I've my little theory that he's the very phœnix of usurpers, that he has been very much struck with what the experts have had to say for you, and that he wishes to have the originality of making over to you your share — so limited after all — of the estate."

"I give it up!" my friend mused. "Come what come will!"

"You, of course," said Miss Searle, reappearing and turning to me, "are included in my brother's

invitation. I've told them to see about a room for you. Your luggage shall immediately be sent for."

It was arranged that I in person should be driven over to our little inn and that I should return with our effects in time to meet Mr. Searle at dinner. On my arrival several hours later I was immediately conducted to my room. The servant pointed out to me that it communicated by a door and a private passage with that of my fellow visitor. I made my way along this passage — a low narrow corridor with a broad latticed casement through which there streamed upon a series of grotesquely sculptured oaken closets and cupboards the vivid animating glow of the western sun — knocked at his door and, getting no answer, opened it. In an armchair by the open window sat my friend asleep, his arms and legs relaxed and head dropped on his breast. It was a great relief to see him rest thus from his rhapsodies, and I watched him for some moments before waking him. There was a faint glow of colour in his cheek and a light expressive parting of his lips, something nearer to ease and peace than I had yet seen in him. It was almost happiness, it was almost health. I laid my hand on his arm and gently shook it. He opened his eyes, gazed at me a moment, vaguely recognised me, then closed them again. "Let me dream, let me dream!"

"What are you dreaming about?"

A moment passed before his answer came. "About a tall woman in a quaint black dress, with yellow hair and a sweet, sweet smile, and a soft low delicious voice! I'm in love with her."

"It's better to see her than to dream about her," I said. "Get up and dress; then we'll go down to dinner and meet her."

"Dinner — dinner —?" And he gradually opened his eyes again. "Yes, upon my word I shall dine!"

"Oh you're all right!" I declared for the twentieth time as he rose to his feet. "You'll live to bury Mr. Simmons." He told me he had spent the hours of my absence with Miss Searle — they had strolled together half over the place. "You must be very intimate," I smiled.

"She's intimate with *me*. Goodness knows what rigmarole I've treated her to!" They had parted an hour ago; since when, he believed, her brother had arrived.

The slow-fading twilight was still in the great drawing-room when we came down. The housekeeper had told us this apartment was rarely used, there being others, smaller and more convenient, for the same needs. It seemed now, however, to be occupied in my comrade's honour. At the furthest end, rising to the roof like a royal tomb in a cathedral, was a great chimney-piece of chiselled white marble, yellowed by time, in which a light fire was crackling. Before the fire stood a small short man, with his hands behind him; near him was Miss Searle, so transformed by her dress that at first I scarcely knew her. There was in our entrance and reception something remarkably chilling and solemn. We moved in silence up the long room; Mr. Searle advanced slowly, a dozen steps, to meet us; his sister stood motionless. I was conscious of her masking her visage

with a large white tinselled fan, and that her eyes, grave and enlarged, watched us intently over the top of it. The master of Lackley grasped in silence the proffered hand of his kinsman and eyed him from head to foot, suppressing, I noted, a start of surprise at his resemblance to Sir Joshua's portrait. "This is a happy day." And then turning to me with an odd little sharp stare: "My cousin's friend is my friend." Miss Searle lowered her fan.

The first thing that struck me in Mr. Searle's appearance was his very limited stature, which was less by half a head than that of his sister. The second was the preternatural redness of his hair and beard. They intermingled over his ears and surrounded his head like a huge lurid nimbus. His face was pale and attenuated, the face of a scholar, a dilettante, a comparer of points and texts, a man who lives in a library bending over books and prints and medals. At a distance it might have passed for smooth and rather blankly composed; but on a nearer view it revealed a number of wrinkles, sharply etched and scratched, of a singularly aged and refined effect. It was the complexion of a man of sixty. His nose was arched and delicate, identical almost with the nose of my friend. His eyes, large and deep-set, had a kind of auburn glow, the suggestion of a keen metal red-hot — or, more plainly, were full of temper and spirit. Imagine this physiognomy — grave and solemn, grotesquely solemn, in spite of the bushy brightness which made a sort of frame for it — set in motion by a queer, quick, defiant, perfunctory, preoccupied smile, and you will have an imperfect notion of the

remarkable presence of our host; something better worth seeing and knowing, I perceived as I quite breathlessly took him in, than anything we had yet encountered. How thoroughly I had entered into sympathy with my poor picked-up friend, and how effectually I had associated my sensibilities with his own, I had not suspected till, within the short five minutes before the signal for dinner, I became aware, without his giving me the least hint, of his placing himself on the defensive. To neither of us was Mr. Searle sympathetic. I might have guessed from her attitude that his sister entered into our thoughts. A marked change had been wrought in her since the morning; during the hour, indeed — as I read in the light of the wondering glance he cast at her — that had elapsed since her parting with her cousin. She had not yet recovered from some great agitation. Her face was pale and she had clearly been crying. These notes of trouble gave her a new and quite perverse dignity, which was further enhanced by something complimentary and commemorative in her dress.

Whether it was taste or whether it was accident I know not; but the amiable creature, as she stood there half in the cool twilight, half in the arrested glow of the fire as it spent itself in the vastness of its marble cave, was a figure for a painter. She was habited in some faded splendour of sea-green crape and silk, a piece of millinery which, though it must have witnessed a number of dull dinners, preserved still a festive air. Over her white shoulders she wore an ancient web of the most precious and venerable

lace and about her rounded throat a single series of large pearls. I went in with her to dinner, and Mr. Searle, following with my friend, took his arm, as the latter afterwards told me, and pretended jocosely to conduct him. As dinner proceeded the feeling grew within me that a drama had begun to be played in which the three persons before me were actors — each of a really arduous part. The character allotted to my friend, however, was certainly the least easy to represent with effect, though I overflowed with the desire that he should acquit himself to his honour. I seemed to see him urge his faded faculties to take their cue and perform. The poor fellow tried to do himself credit more seriously than ever in his old best days. With Miss Searle, credulous passive and pitying, he had finally flung aside all vanity and propriety and shown the bottom of his fantastic heart. But with our host there might be no talking of nonsense nor taking of liberties; there and then, if ever, sat a consummate conservative, breathing the fumes of hereditary privilege and security. For an hour, accordingly, I saw my poor protégé attempt, all in pain, to meet a new decorum. He set himself the task of appearing very American, in order that his appreciation of everything Mr. Searle represented might seem purely disinterested. What his kinsman had expected him to be I know not; but I made Mr. Searle out as annoyed, in spite of his exaggerated urbanity, at finding him so harmless. Our host was not the man to show his hand, but I think his best card had been a certain implicit confidence that so provincial a parasite would hardly have good manners.

He led the conversation to the country we had left; rather as if a leash had been attached to the collar of some lumpish and half-domesticated animal the tendency of whose movements had to be recognised. He spoke of it indeed as of some fabled planet, alien to the British orbit, lately proclaimed to have the admixture of atmospheric gases required to support animal life, but not, save under cover of a liberal afterthought, to be admitted into one's regular conception of things. I, for my part, felt nothing but regret that the spheric smoothness of his universe should be disfigured by the extrusion even of such inconsiderable particles as ourselves.

"I knew in a general way of our having somehow ramified over there," Mr. Searle mentioned; "but had scarcely followed it more than you pretend to pick up the fruit your long-armed pear tree may drop, on the other side of your wall, in your neighbour's garden. There was a man I knew at Cambridge, a very odd fellow, a decent fellow too; he and I were rather cronies; I think he afterwards went to the Middle States. They'll be, I suppose, about the Mississippi? At all events, there was that great-uncle of mine whom Sir Joshua painted. He went to America, but he never got there. He was lost at sea. You look enough like him to make one fancy he *did* get there and that you've kept him alive by one of those beastly processes — I think you have 'em over there: what do you call it, 'putting up' things? If you're he you've not done a wise thing to show yourself here. He left a bad name behind him. There's a ghost who comes sobbing about the house every

now and then, the ghost of one to whom he did a wrong."

"Oh mercy *on* us!" cried Miss Searle in simple horror.

"Of course *you* know nothing of such things," he rather dryly allowed. "You 're too sound a sleeper to hear the sobbing of ghosts."

"I 'm sure I should like immensely to hear the sobbing of a ghost," said my friend, the light of his previous eagerness playing up into his eyes. "Why does it sob? I feel as if that were what we 've come above all to learn."

Mr. Searle eyed his audience a moment gaugingly; he held the balance as to measure his resources. He wished to do justice to his theme. With the long finger-nails of his left hand nervously playing against the tinkling crystal of his wineglass and his conscious eyes betraying that, small and strange as he sat there, he knew himself, to his pleasure and advantage, remarkably impressive, he dropped into our untutored minds the sombre legend of his house. "Mr. Clement Searle, from all I gather, was a young man of great talents but a weak disposition. His mother was left a widow early in life, with two sons, of whom he was the elder and the more promising. She educated him with the greatest affection and care. Of course when he came to manhood she wished him to marry well. His means were quite sufficient to enable him to overlook the want of money in his wife; and Mrs. Searle selected a young lady who possessed, as she conceived, every good gift save a fortune — a fine proud handsome girl, the daughter of an old friend, an old lover I suspect, of

her own. Clement, however, as it appeared, had either chosen otherwise or was as yet unprepared to choose. The young lady opened upon him in vain the battery of her attractions; in vain his mother urged her cause. Clement remained cold, insensible, inflexible. Mrs. Searle had a character which appears to have gone out of fashion in my family nowadays; she was a great manager, a *maîtresse-femme*. A proud passionate imperious woman, she had had immense cares and ever so many law-suits; they had sharpened her temper and her will. She suspected that her son's affections had another object, and this object she began to hate. Irritated by his stubborn defiance of her wishes she persisted in her purpose. The more she watched him the more she was convinced he loved in secret. If he loved in secret of course he loved beneath him. He went about the place all sombre and sullen and brooding. At last, with the rashness of an angry woman, she threatened to bring the young lady of her choice — who, by the way, seems to have been no shrinking blossom — to stay in the house. A stormy scene was the result. He threatened that if she did so he would leave the country and sail for America. She probably disbelieved him; she knew him to be weak, but she overrated his weakness. At all events the rejected one arrived and Clement Searle departed. On a dark December day he took ship at Southampton. The two women, desperate with rage and sorrow, sat alone in this big house, mingling their tears and imprecations. A fortnight later, on Christmas Eve, in the midst of a great snowstorm long famous in the country, something happened that quickened their bitterness. A

young woman, battered and chilled by the storm, gained entrance to the house and, making her way into the presence of the mistress and her guest, poured out her tale. She was a poor curate's daughter out of some little hole in Gloucestershire. Clement Searle had loved her — loved her all too well! She had been turned out in wrath from her father's house; his mother at least might pity her — if not for herself then for the child she was soon to bring forth. But the poor girl had been a second time too trustful. The women, in scorn, in horror, with blows possibly, drove her forth again into the storm. In the storm she wandered and in the deep snow she died. Her lover, as you know, perished in that hard winter weather at sea; the news came to his mother late, but soon enough. We're haunted by the curate's daughter!"

Mr. Searle retailed this anecdote with infinite taste and point, the happiest art; when he ceased there was a pause of some moments. "Ah well we may be!" Miss Searle then mournfully murmured.

Searle blazed up into enthusiasm. "Of course, you know"—with which he began to blush violently—"I should be sorry to claim any identity with the poor devil my faithless namesake. But I should be immensely gratified if the young lady's spirit, deceived by my resemblance, were to mistake me for her cruel lover. She's welcome to the comfort of it. What one can do in the case I shall be glad to do. But can a ghost haunt a ghost? I *am* a ghost!"

Mr. Searle stared a moment and then had a subtle sneer. "I could almost believe you are!"

"Oh brother — and cousin!" cried Miss Searle with the gentlest yet most appealing dignity. "How can you talk so horribly?"

The horrible talk, however, evidently possessed a potent magic for my friend; and his imagination, checked a while by the influence of his kinsman, began again to lead him a dance. From this moment he ceased to steer his frail bark, to care what he said or how he said it, so long as he expressed his passionate appreciation of the scene around him. As he kept up this strain I ceased even secretly to wish he would n't. I have wondered since that I should n't have been annoyed by the way he reverted constantly to himself. But a great frankness, for the time, makes its own law and a great passion its own channel. There was moreover an irresponsible indescribable effect of beauty in everything his lips uttered. Free alike from adulation and from envy, the essence of his discourse was a divine apprehension, a romantic vision free as the flight of Ariel, of the poetry of his companions' situation and their contrasted general irresponsiveness.

"How does the look of age come?" he suddenly broke out at dessert. "Does it come of itself, unobserved, unrecorded, unmeasured? Or do you woo it and set baits and traps for it, and watch it like the dawning brownness of a meerschaum pipe, and make it fast, when it appears, just where it peeps out, and light a votive taper beneath it and give thanks to it daily? Or do you forbid it and fight it and resist it, and yet feel it settling and deepening about you as irresistible as fate?"

"What the deuce is the man talking about?" said the smile of our host.

"I found a little grey hair this morning," Miss Searle incoherently prosed.

"Well then I hope you paid it every respect!" cried her visitor.

"I looked at it for a long time in my hand-glass," she answered with more presence of mind.

"Miss Searle can for many years to come afford to be amused at grey hairs," I interposed in the hope of some greater ease.

It had its effect. "Ten years from last Thursday I shall be forty-four," she almost comfortably smiled.

"Well, that's just what I am," said Searle. "If I had only come here ten years ago! I should have had more time to enjoy the feast, but I should have had less appetite. I needed first to get famished."

"Oh why did you wait for that?" his entertainer asked. "To think of these ten years that we might have been enjoying you!" At the vision of which waste and loss Mr. Searle had a fine shrill laugh.

"Well," my friend explained, "I always had a notion — a stupid vulgar notion if there ever was one — that to come abroad properly one had to have a pot of money. My pot was too nearly empty. At last I came with my empty pot!"

Mr. Searle had a wait for delicacy, but he proceeded. "You're reduced, you're — a — straitened?"

Our companion's very breath blew away the veil. "Reduced to nothing. Straitened to the clothes on my back!"

"You don't say so!" said Mr. Searle with a large

vague gasp. "Well — well — well!" he added in a voice which might have meant everything or nothing; and then, in his whimsical way, went on to finish a glass of wine. His searching eye, as he drank, met mine, and for a moment we each rather deeply sounded the other, to the effect no doubt of a slight embarrassment. "And you," he said by way of carrying this off — "how about *your* wardrobe?"

"Oh his!" cried my friend; "his wardrobe's immense. He could dress up a regiment!" He had drunk more champagne — I admit that the champagne was good — than was from any point of view to have been desired. He was rapidly drifting beyond any tacit dissuasion of mine. He was feverish and rash, and all attempt to direct would now simply irritate him. As we rose from the table he caught my troubled look. Passing his arm for a moment into mine, "This is the great night!" he strangely and softly said; "the night and the crisis that will settle me."

Mr. Searle had caused the whole lower portion of the house to be thrown open and a multitude of lights to be placed in convenient and effective positions. Such a marshalled wealth of ancient candlesticks and flambeaux I had never beheld. Niched against the dusky wainscots, casting great luminous circles upon the pendent stiffness of sombre tapestries, enhancing and completing with admirable effect the variety and mystery of the great ancient house, they seemed to people the wide rooms, as our little group passed slowly from one to another, with a dim expectant presence. We had thus, in spite of everything, a won-

derful hour of it. Mr. Searle at once assumed the part of cicerone, and — I had not hitherto done him justice — Mr. Searle became almost agreeable. While I lingered behind with his sister he walked in advance with his kinsman. It was as if he had said: "Well, if you want the old place you shall have it — so far as the impression goes!" He spared us no thrill — I had almost said no pang — of that experience. Carrying a tall silver candlestick in his left hand, he raised it and lowered it and cast the light hither and thither, upon pictures and hangings and carvings and cornices. He knew his house to perfection. He touched upon a hundred traditions and memories, he threw off a cloud of rich reference to its earlier occupants. He threw off again, in his easy elegant way, a dozen — happily lighter — anecdotes. His relative attended with a brooding deference. Miss Searle and I meanwhile were not wholly silent.

"I suppose that by this time you and your cousin are almost old friends," I remarked.

She trifled a moment with her fan and then raised her kind small eyes. "Old friends — yet at the same time strangely new! My cousin, my cousin" — and her voice lingered on the word — "it seems so strange to call him my cousin after thinking these many years that I 've no one in the world but my brother. But he's really so very odd!"

"It's not so much he as — well, as his situation, that deserves that name," I tried to reason.

"I 'm so sorry for his situation. I wish I could help it in some way. He interests me so much." She gave a sweet-sounding sigh. "I wish I could have known

him sooner — and better. He tells me he's but the shadow of what he used to be."

I wondered if he had been consciously practising on the sensibilities of this gentle creature. If he had I believed he had gained his point. But his position had in fact become to my sense so precarious that I hardly ventured to be glad. "His better self just now seems again to be taking shape," I said. "It will have been a good deed on your part if you help to restore him to all he ought to be."

She met my idea blankly. "Dear me, what can I do?"

"Be a friend to him. Let him like you, let him love you. I dare say you see in him now much to pity and to wonder at. But let him simply enjoy a while the grateful sense of your nearness and dearness. He'll be a better and stronger man for it, and then you can love him, you can esteem him, without restriction."

She fairly frowned for helplessness. "It's a hard part for poor stupid me to play!"

Her almost infantine innocence left me no choice but to be absolutely frank. "Did you ever play any part at all?"

She blushed as if I had been reproaching her with her insignificance. "Never! I think I've hardly lived."

"You've begun to live now perhaps. You've begun to care for something else than your old-fashioned habits. Pardon me if I seem rather meddlesome; you know we Americans are very rough and ready. It's a great moment. I wish you joy!"

"I could almost believe you're laughing at me. I feel more trouble than joy."

"Why do you feel trouble?"

She paused with her eyes fixed on our companions. "My cousin's arrival's a great disturbance," she said at last.

"You mean you did wrong in coming to meet him? In that case the fault's mine. He had no intention of giving you the opportunity."

"I certainly took too much on myself. But I can't find it in my heart to regret it. I never shall regret it! I did the only thing I *could*, heaven forgive me!"

"Heaven bless you, Miss Searle! Is any harm to come of it? I did the evil; let me bear the brunt!"

She shook her head gravely. "You don't know my brother!"

"The sooner I master the subject the better then," I said. I could n't help relieving myself — at least by the tone of my voice — of the antipathy with which, decidedly, this gentleman had inspired me. "Not perhaps that we should get on so well together!" After which, as she turned away, "Are you *very* much afraid of him?" I added.

She gave me a shuddering sidelong glance. "He's looking at me!"

He was placed with his back to us, holding a large Venetian hand-mirror, framed in chiselled silver, which he had taken from a shelf of antiquities, just at such an angle that he caught the reflexion of his sister's person. It was evident that I too was under his attention, and I was resolved I would n't

be suspected for nothing. "Miss Searle," I said with urgency, "promise me something."

She turned upon me with a start and a look that seemed to beg me to spare her. "Oh don't ask me — please don't!" It was as if she were standing on the edge of a place where the ground had suddenly fallen away, and had been called upon to make a leap. I felt retreat was impossible, however, and that it was the greater kindness to assist her to jump.

"Promise me," I repeated.

Still with her eyes she protested. "Oh what a dreadful day!" she cried at last.

"Promise me to let him speak to you alone if he should ask you — any wish you may suspect on your brother's part notwithstanding."

She coloured deeply. "You mean he has something so particular to say?"

"Something so particular!"

"Poor cousin!"

"Well, poor cousin! But promise me."

"I promise," she said, and moved away across the long room and out of the door.

"You're in time to hear the most delightful story," Searle began to me as I rejoined him and his host. They were standing before an old sombre portrait of a lady in the dress of Queen Anne's time, whose ill-painted flesh-tints showed livid, in the candle-light, against her dark drapery and background. "This is Mrs. Margaret Searle — a sort of Beatrix Esmond — *qui se passait ses fantaisies*. She married a paltry Frenchman, a penniless fiddler, in the teeth of her whole family. Pretty Mrs. Margaret, you must have

been a woman of courage! Upon my word, she looks like Miss Searle! But pray go on. What came of it all?"

Our companion watched him with an air of distaste for his boisterous homage and of pity for his crude imagination. But he took up the tale with an effective dryness: "I found a year ago, in a box of very old papers, a letter from the lady in question to a certain Cynthia Searle, her elder sister. It was dated from Paris and dreadfully ill-spelled. It contained a most passionate appeal for pecuniary assistance. She had just had a baby, she was starving and dreadfully neglected by her husband — she cursed the day she had left England. It was a most dismal production. I never heard she found means to return."

"So much for marrying a Frenchman!" I said sententiously.

Our host had one of his waits. "This is the only lady of the family who ever was taken in by an adventurer."

"Does Miss Searle know her history?" asked my friend with a stare at the rounded whiteness of the heroine's cheek.

"Miss Searle knows nothing!" said our host with expression.

"She shall know at least the tale of Mrs. Margaret," their guest returned; and he walked rapidly away in search of her.

Mr. Searle and I pursued our march through the lighted rooms. "You've found a cousin with a vengeance," I doubtless awkwardly enough laughed.

"Ah a vengeance?" my entertainer stiffly repeated.

"I mean that he takes as keen an interest in your annals and possessions as yourself."

"Oh exactly so! He tells me he's a bad invalid," he added in a moment. "I should never have supposed it."

"Within the past few hours he's a changed man. Your beautiful house, your extreme kindness, have refreshed him immensely."

Mr. Searle uttered the vague ejaculation with which self-conscious Britons so often betray the concussion of any especial courtesy of speech. But he followed this by a sudden odd glare and the sharp declaration: "I'm an honest man!" I was quite prepared to assent; but he went on with a fury of frankness, as if it were the first time in his life he had opened himself to any one, as if the process were highly disagreeable and he were hurrying through it as a task. "An honest man, mind you! I know nothing about Mr. Clement Searle! I never expected to see him. He has been to me a — a —!" And here he paused to select a word which should vividly enough express what, for good or for ill, his kinsman represented. "He has been to me an Amazement! I've no doubt he's a most amiable man. You'll not deny, however, that he's a very extraordinary sort of person. I'm sorry he's ill. I'm sorry he's poor. He's my fiftieth cousin. Well and good. I'm an honest man. He shall not have it to say that he was n't received at my house."

"He too, thank heaven, is an honest man!" I smiled.

"Why the devil then," cried Mr. Searle, turning

almost fiercely on me, "has he put forward this underhand claim to my property?"

The question, quite ringing out, flashed backward a gleam of light upon the demeanour of our host and the suppressed agitation of his sister. In an instant the jealous gentleman revealed itself. For a moment I was so surprised and scandalised at the directness of his attack that I lacked words to reply. As soon as he had spoken indeed Mr. Searle appeared to feel he had been wanting in form. "Pardon me," he began afresh, "if I speak of this matter with heat. But I've been more disgusted than I can say to hear, as I heard this morning from my solicitor, of the extraordinary proceedings of Mr. Clement Searle. Gracious goodness, sir, for what does the man take me? He pretends to the Lord knows what fantastic admiration for my place. Let him then show his respect for it by not taking too many liberties! Let him, with his high-flown parade of loyalty, imagine a tithe of what *I* feel! I love my estate; it's my passion, my conscience, my life! Am I to divide it up at this time of day with a beggarly foreigner — a man without means, without appearance, without proof, a pretender, an adventurer, a chattering mountebank? I thought America boasted having lands for all men! Upon my soul, sir, I've never been so shocked in my life."

I paused for some moments before speaking, to allow his passion fully to expend itself and to flicker up again if it chose; for so far as I was concerned in the whole awkward matter I but wanted to deal with him discreetly. "Your apprehensions, sir," I said at last, "your not unnatural surprise, perhaps, at

the candour of our interest, have acted too much on your nerves. You 're attacking a man of straw, a creature of unworthy illusion; though I 'm sadly afraid you 've wounded a man of spirit and conscience. Either my friend has no valid claim on your estate, in which case your agitation is superfluous; or he *has* a valid claim —"

Mr. Searle seized my arm and glared at me; his pale face paler still with the horror of my suggestion, his great eyes of alarm glowing and his strange red hair erect and quivering. "A valid claim!" he shouted. "Let him try it — let him bring it into court!"

We had emerged into the great hall and stood facing the main doorway. The door was open into the portico, through the stone archway of which I saw the garden glitter in the blue light of a full moon. As the master of the house uttered the words I have just repeated my companion came slowly up into the porch from without, bareheaded, bright in the outer moonlight, dark in the shadow of the archway, and bright again in the lamplight at the entrance of the hall. As he crossed the threshold the butler made an appearance at the head of the staircase on our left, faltering visibly a moment at sight of Mr. Searle; after which, noting my friend, he gravely descended. He bore in his hand a small silver tray. On the tray, gleaming in the light of the suspended lamp, lay a folded note. Clement Searle came forward, staring a little and startled, I think, by some quick nervous prevision of a catastrophe. The butler applied the match to the train. He advanced to my fellow visitor, all solemnly, with the offer of his missive. Mr. Searle made

a movement as if to spring forward, but controlled himself. "Tottenham!" he called in a strident voice.

"Yes, sir!" said Tottenham, halting.

"Stand where you are. For whom is that note?"

"For Mr. Clement Searle," said the butler, staring straight before him and dissociating himself from everything.

"Who gave it to you?"

"Mrs. Horridge, sir." This personage, I afterwards learned, was our friend the housekeeper.

"Who gave it Mrs. Horridge?"

There was on Tottenham's part just an infinitesimal pause before replying.

"My dear sir," broke in Searle, his equilibrium, his ancient ease, completely restored by the crisis, "is n't that rather my business?"

"What happens in my house is my business, and detestable things seem to be happening." Our host, it was clear, now so furiously detested them that I was afraid he would snatch the bone of contention without more ceremony. "Bring me that thing!" he cried; on which Tottenham stiffly moved to obey.

"Really this is too much!" broke out my companion, affronted and helpless.

So indeed it struck me, and before Mr. Searle had time to take the note I possessed myself of it. "If you've no consideration for your sister let a stranger at least act for her." And I tore the disputed object into a dozen pieces.

"In the name of decency, what does this horrid business mean?" my companion quavered.

Mr. Searle was about to open fire on him, but at

that moment our hostess appeared on the staircase, summoned evidently by our high-pitched contentious voices. She had exchanged her dinner-dress for a dark wrapper, removed her ornaments and begun to disarrange her hair, a thick tress of which escaped from the comb. She hurried down with a pale questioning face. Feeling distinctly that, for ourselves, immediate departure was in the air, and divining Mr. Tottenham to be a person of a few deep-seated instincts and of much latent energy, I seized the opportunity to request him, *sotto voce*, to send a carriage to the door without delay. "And put up our things," I added.

Our host rushed at his sister and grabbed the white wrist that escaped from the loose sleeve of her dress. "What was in that note?" he quite hissed at her.

Miss Searle looked first at its scattered fragments and then at her cousin. "Did you read it?"

"No, but I thank you for it!" said Searle.

Her eyes, for an instant, communicated with his own as I think they had never, never communicated with any other source of meaning; then she transferred them to her brother's face, where the sense went out of them, only to leave a dull sad patience. But there was something even in this flat humility that seemed to him to mock him, so that he flushed crimson with rage and spite and flung her away. "You always were an idiot! Go to bed."

In poor Searle's face as well the gathered serenity had been by this time all blighted and distorted and the reflected brightness of his happy day turned to

blank confusion. "Have I been dealing these three hours with a madman?" he woefully cried.

"A madman, yes, if you will! A man mad with the love of his home and the sense of its stability. I've held my tongue till now, but you've been too much for me. Who the devil are you, and what and why and whence?" the terrible little man continued. "From what paradise of fools do you come that you fancy I shall make over to you, for the asking, a part of my property and my life? I'm forsooth, you ridiculous person, to go shares with you? Prove your preposterous claim! There is n't *that* in it!" And he kicked one of the bits of paper on the floor.

Searle received this broadside gaping. Then turning away he went and seated himself on a bench against the wall and rubbed his forehead amazedly. I looked at my watch and listened for the wheels of our carriage.

But his kinsman was too launched to pull himself up. "Was n't it enough that you should have plotted against my rights? Need you have come into my very house to intrigue with my sister?"

My friend put his two hands to his face. "Oh, oh, oh!" he groaned while Miss Searle crossed rapidly and dropped on her knees at his side.

"Go to bed, you fool!" shrieked her brother.

"Dear cousin," she said, "it's cruel you're to have so to think of us!"

"Oh I shall think of *you* as you'd like!" He laid a hand on her head.

"I believe you've done nothing wrong," she brought bravely out.

"I've done what I could," Mr. Searle went on — "but it's arrant folly to pretend to friendship when this abomination lies between us. You were welcome to my meat and my wine, but I wonder you could swallow them. The sight spoiled *my* appetite!" cried the master of Lackley with a laugh. "Proceed with your trumpery case! My people in London are instructed and prepared."

"I should n't wonder if your case had improved a good deal since you gave it up," I was moved to observe to Searle.

"Oho! you don't feign ignorance then?" and our insane entertainer shook his shining head at me. "It's very kind of you to give it up! Perhaps you'll also give up my sister!"

Searle sat staring in distress at his adversary. "Ah miserable man — I thought we had become such beautiful friends."

"Boh, you hypocrite!" screamed our host.

Searle seemed not to hear him. "Am I seriously expected," he slowly and painfully pursued, "to defend myself against the accusation of any real indelicacy — to prove I've done nothing underhand or impudent? Think what you please!" And he rose, with an effort, to his feet. "I know what *you* think!" he added to Miss Searle.

The wheels of the carriage resounded on the gravel, and at the same moment a footman descended with our two portmanteaux. Mr. Tottenham followed him with our hats and coats.

"Good God," our host broke out again, "you're not going away?" — an ejaculation that, after all

that had happened, had the grandest comicality. "Bless my soul," he then remarked as artlessly, "of course you're going!"

"It's perhaps well," said Miss Searle with a great effort, inexpressibly touching in one for whom great efforts were visibly new and strange, "that I should tell you what my poor little note contained."

"That matter of your note, madam," her brother interrupted, "you and I will settle together!"

"Let me imagine all sorts of kind things!" Searle beautifully pleaded.

"Ah too much has been imagined!" she answered simply. "It was only a word of warning. It was to tell you to go. I knew something painful was coming."

He took his hat. "The pains and the pleasures of this day," he said to his kinsman, "I shall equally never forget. Knowing you," and he offered his hand to Miss Searle, "has been the pleasure of pleasures. I hoped something more might have come of it."

"A monstrous deal too much has come of it!" Mr. Searle irrepressibly declared.

His departing guest looked at him mildly, almost benignantly, from head to foot, and then with closed eyes and some collapse of strength, "I'm afraid so, I can't stand more," he went on. I gave him my arm and we crossed the threshold. As we passed out I heard Miss Searle break into loud weeping.

"We shall hear from each other yet, I take it!" her brother pursued, harassing our retreat.

My friend stopped, turning round on him fiercely. "You very impossible man!" he cried in his face.

"Do you mean to say you'll not prosecute?" —

Mr. Searle kept it up. "I shall force you to prosecute! I shall drag you into court, and you shall be beaten — beaten — beaten!" Which grim reiteration followed us on our course.

We drove of course to the little wayside inn from which we had departed in the morning so unencumbered, in all broad England, either with enemies or friends. My companion, as the carriage rolled along, seemed overwhelmed and exhausted. "What a beautiful horrible dream!" he confusedly wailed. "What a strange awakening! What a long long day! What a hideous scene! Poor me! Poor woman!" When we had resumed possession of our two little neighbouring rooms I asked him whether Miss Searle's note had been the result of anything that had passed between them on his going to rejoin her. "I found her on the terrace," he said, "walking restlessly up and down in the moonlight. I was greatly excited — I hardly know what I said. I asked her, I think, if she knew the story of Margaret Searle. She seemed frightened and troubled, and she used just the words her brother had used — 'I know nothing.' For the moment, somehow, I felt as a man drunk. I stood before her and told her, with great emphasis, how poor Margaret had married a beggarly foreigner — all in obedience to her heart and in defiance to her family. As I talked the sheeted moonlight seemed to close about us, so that we stood there in a dream, in a world quite detached. She grew younger, prettier, more attractive — I found myself talking all kinds of nonsense. Before I knew it I had gone very far. I was taking her hand and calling her 'Margaret, dear

Margaret!' She had said it was impossible, that she could do nothing, that she was a fool, a child, a slave. Then with a sudden sense — it was odd how it came over me there — of the reality of my connexion with the place, I spoke of my claim against the estate. 'It exists,' I declared, 'but I've given it up. Be generous! Pay me for my sacrifice.' For an instant her face was radiant. 'If I marry you,' she asked, 'will it make everything right?' Of that I at once assured her — in our marriage the whole difficulty would melt away like a rain-drop in the great sea. 'Our marriage!' she repeated in wonder; and the deep ring of her voice seemed to wake us up and show us our folly. 'I love you, but I shall never see you again,' she cried; and she hurried away with her face in her hands. I walked up and down the terrace for some moments, and then came in and met you. That's the only witchcraft I've used!"

The poor man was at once so roused and so shaken by the day's events that I believed he would get little sleep. Conscious on my own part that I should n't close my eyes, I but partly undressed, stirred my fire and sat down to do some writing. I heard the great clock in the little parlour below strike twelve, one, half-past one. Just as the vibration of this last stroke was dying on the air the door of communication with Searle's room was flung open and my companion stood on the threshold, pale as a corpse, in his night-shirt, shining like a phantom against the darkness behind him. "Look well at me!" he intensely gasped; "touch me, embrace me, revere me! You see a man who has seen a ghost!"

"Gracious goodness, what do you mean?"

"Write it down!" he went on. "There, take your pen. Put it into dreadful words. How do I look? Am I human? Am I pale? Am I red? Am I speaking English? A ghost, sir! Do you understand?"

I confess there came upon me by contact a kind of supernatural shock. I shall always feel by the whole communication of it that I too have seen a ghost. My first movement — I can smile at it now — was to spring to the door, close it quickly and turn the key upon the gaping blackness from which Searle had emerged. I seized his two hands; they were wet with perspiration. I pushed my chair to the fire and forced him to sit down in it; then I got on my knees and held his hands as firmly as possible. They trembled and quivered; his eyes were fixed save that the pupil dilated and contracted with extraordinary force. I asked no questions, but waited there, very curious for what he would say. At last he spoke. "I'm not frightened, but I'm — oh excited! This is life! This is living! My nerves — my heart — my brain! They're throbbing — don't you feel it? Do you tingle? Are you hot? Are you cold? Hold me tight — tight — tight! I shall tremble away into waves — into surges — and know all the secrets of things and all the reasons and all the mysteries!" He paused a moment and then went on: "A woman — as clear as that candle: no, far clearer! In a blue dress, with a black mantle on her head and a little black muff. Young and wonderfully pretty, pale and ill; with the sadness of all the women who ever loved and suffered pleading and accusing in her wet-looking

eyes. God knows I never did any such thing! But she took me for my elder, for the other Clement. She came to me here as she would have come to me there. She wrung her hands and she spoke to me. 'Marry me!' she moaned; 'marry me and put an end to my shame!' I sat up in bed, just as I sit here, looked at her, heard her — heard her voice melt away, watched her figure fade away. Bless us and save us! Here I be!"

I made no attempt either to explain or to criticise this extraordinary passage. It 's enough that I yielded for the hour to the strange force of my friend's emotion. On the whole I think my own vision was the more interesting of the two. He beheld but the transient irresponsible spectre — I beheld the human subject hot from the spectral presence. Yet I soon recovered my judgement sufficiently to be moved again to try to guard him against the results of excitement and exposure. It was easily agreed that he was not for the night to return to his room, and I made him fairly comfortable in his place by my fire. Wishing above all to preserve him from a chill I removed my bedding and wrapped him in the blankets and counterpane. I had no nerves either for writing or for sleep; so I put out my lights, renewed the fuel and sat down on the opposite side of the hearth. I found it a great and high solemnity just to watch my companion. Silent, swathed and muffled to his chin, he sat rigid and erect with the dignity of his adventure. For the most part his eyes were closed; though from time to time he would open them with a steady expansion and stare, never blinking, into the flame, as

if he again beheld without terror the image of the little woman with the muff. His cadaverous emaciated face, his tragic wrinkles intensified by the upward glow from the hearth, his distorted moustache, his extraordinary gravity and a certain fantastical air as the red light flickered over him, all re-enforced his fine likeness to the vision-haunted knight of La Mancha when laid up after some grand exploit. The night passed wholly without speech. Toward its close I slept for half an hour. When I awoke the awakened birds had begun to twitter and Searle, unperturbed, sat staring at me. We exchanged a long look, and I felt with a pang that his glittering eyes had tasted their last of natural sleep. "How is it? Are you comfortable?" I nevertheless asked.

He fixed me for a long time without replying and then spoke with a weak extravagance and with such pauses between his words as might have represented the slow prompting of an inner voice. "You asked me when you first knew me what I was. 'Nothing,' I said, 'nothing of any consequence.' Nothing I've always supposed myself to be. But I've wronged myself — I'm a great exception. I'm a haunted man!"

If sleep had passed out of his eyes I felt with even a deeper pang that sanity had abandoned his spirit. From this moment I was prepared for the worst. There were in my friend, however, such confirmed habits of mildness that I found myself not in the least fearing he would prove unmanageable. As morning began fully to dawn upon us I brought our curious vigil to a close. Searle was so enfeebled that I gave him my hands to help him out of his chair, and he re-

tained them for some moments after rising to his feet, unable as he seemed to keep his balance. "Well," he said, "I've been once favoured, but don't think I shall be favoured again. I shall soon be myself as fit to 'appear' as any of them. I shall haunt the master of Lackley! It can only mean one thing — that they're getting ready for me on the other side of the grave."

When I touched the question of breakfast he replied that he had his breakfast in his pocket; and he drew from his travelling-bag a phial of morphine. He took a strong dose and went to bed. At noon I found him on foot again, dressed, shaved, much refreshed. "Poor fellow," he said, "you've got more than you bargained for — not only a man with a grievance but a man with a ghost. Well, it won't be for long!" It had of course promptly become a question whither we should now direct our steps. "As I've so little time," he argued for this, "I should like to see the best, the best alone." I answered that either for time or eternity I had always supposed Oxford to represent the English maximum, and for Oxford in the course of an hour we accordingly departed.

IV

Of that extraordinary place I shall not attempt to speak with any order or indeed with any coherence. It must ever remain one of the supreme gratifications of travel for any American aware of the ancient pieties of race. The impression it produces, the emotions it kindles in the mind of such a visitor, are too rich and various to be expressed in the halting rhythm of prose. Passing through the small oblique streets in which the long grey battered public face of the colleges seems to watch jealously for sounds that may break upon the stillness of study, you feel it the most dignified and most educated of cities. Over and through it all the great corporate fact of the University slowly throbs after the fashion of some steady bass in a concerted piece or that of the mediæval mystical presence of the Empire in the old States of Germany. The plain perpendicular of the so mildly conventual fronts, masking blest seraglios of culture and leisure, irritates the imagination scarce less than the harem-walls of Eastern towns. Within their arching portals, however, you discover more sacred and sunless courts, and the dark verdure soothing and cooling to bookish eyes. The grey-green quadrangles stand for ever open with a trustful hospitality. The seat of the humanities is stronger in her own good manners than in a marshalled host of wardens and beadles. Directly after our arrival my friend and I wandered forth in the lumin-

ous early dusk. We reached the bridge that underspans the walls of Magdalen and saw the eight-spired tower, delicately fluted and embossed, rise in temperate beauty — the perfect prose of Gothic — wooing the eyes to the sky that was slowly drained of day. We entered the low monkish doorway and stood in the dim little court that nestles beneath the tower, where the swallows niche more lovingly in the tangled ivy than elsewhere in Oxford, and passed into the quiet cloister and studied the small sculptured monsters on the entablature of the arcade. I rejoiced in every one of my unhappy friend's responsive vibrations, even while feeling that they might as direfully multiply as those that had preceded them. I may say that from this time forward I found it difficult to distinguish in his company between the riot of fancy and the labour of thought, or to fix the balance between what he saw and what he imagined. He had already begun playfully to exchange his identity for that of the earlier Clement Searle, and he now delivered himself almost wholly in the character of his old-time kinsman.

"*This* was my college, you know," he would almost anywhere break out, applying the words wherever we stood — "the sweetest and noblest in the whole place. How often have I strolled in this cloister with my intimates of the other world! They are all dead and buried, but many a young fellow as we meet him, dark or fair, tall or short, reminds me of the past age and the early attachment. Even as we stand here, they say, the whole thing feels about its massive base the murmurs of the tide of time; some of the foundation-stones are loosened, some of the breaches will have

to be repaired. Mine was the old unregenerate Oxford, the home of rank abuses, of distinctions and privileges the most delicious and invidious. What cared I, who was a perfect gentleman and with my pockets full of money? I had an allowance of a thousand a year."

It was at once plain to me that he had lost the little that remained of his direct grasp on life and was unequal to any effort of seeing things in their order. He read my apprehension in my eyes and took pains to assure me I was right. "I'm going straight down hill. Thank heaven it's an easy slope, coated with English turf and with an English churchyard at the foot." The hysterical emotion produced by our late dire misadventure had given place to an unruffled calm in which the scene about us was reflected as in an old-fashioned mirror. We took an afternoon walk through Christ-Church meadow and at the river-bank procured a boat which I pulled down the stream to Iffley and to the slanting woods of Nuneham — the sweetest flattest reediest stream-side landscape that could be desired. Here of course we encountered the scattered phalanx of the young, the happy generation, clad in white flannel and blue, muscular fair-haired magnificent fresh, whether floated down the current by idle punts and lounging in friendly couples when not in a singleness that nursed ambitions, or straining together in rhythmic crews and hoarsely exhorted from the near bank. When to the exhibition of so much of the clearest joy of wind and limb we added the great sense of perfumed protection shed by all the enclosed lawns and groves and bowers, we felt that to

be young in such scholastic shades must be a double, an infinite blessing. As my companion found himself less and less able to walk we repaired in turn to a series of gardens and spent long hours sitting in their greenest places. They struck us as the fairest things in England and the ripest and sweetest fruit of the English system. Locked in their antique verdure, guarded, as in the case of New College, by gentle battlements of silver-grey, outshouldering the matted leafage of undisseverable plants, filled with nightingales and memories, a sort of chorus of tradition; with vaguely-generous youths sprawling bookishly on the turf as if to spare it the injury of their boot-heels, and with the great conservative college countenance appealing gravely from the restless outer world, they seem places to lie down on the grass in for ever, in the happy faith that life is all a green old English garden and time an endless summer afternoon. This charmed seclusion was especially grateful to my friend, and his sense of it reached its climax, I remember, on one of the last of such occasions and while we sat in fascinated *flânerie* over against the sturdy back of Saint John's. The wide discreetly-windowed wall here perhaps broods upon the lawn with a more effective air of property than elsewhere. Searle dropped into fitful talk and spun his humour into golden figures. Any passing undergraduate was a peg to hang a fable, every feature of the place a pretext for more embroidery.

"Is n't it all a delightful lie?" he wanted to know. "Might n't one fancy this the very central point of the world's heart, where all the echoes of the general

life arrive but to falter and die? Does n't one feel the air just thick with arrested voices? It 's well there should be such places, shaped in the interest of factitious needs, invented to minister to the book-begotten longing for a medium in which one may dream unwaked and believe unconfuted; to foster the sweet illusion that all 's well in a world where so much is so damnable, all right and rounded, smooth and fair, in this sphere of the rough and ragged, the pitiful unachieved especially, and the dreadful uncommenced. The world 's made — work 's over. Now for leisure! England 's safe — now for Theocritus and Horace, for lawn and sky! What a sense it all gives one of the composite life of the country and of the essential furniture of its luckier minds! Thank heaven they had the wit to send me here in the other time. I 'm not much visibly the braver perhaps, but think how I 'm the happier! The misty spires and towers, seen far off on the level, have been all these years one of the constant things of memory. Seriously, what do the spires and towers do for these people? Are they wiser, gentler, finer, cleverer? My diminished dignity reverts in any case at moments to the naked background of our own education, the deadly dry air in which we gasp for impressions and comparisons. I assent to it all with a sort of desperate calmness; I accept it with a dogged pride. We 're nursed at the opposite pole. Naked come we into a naked world. There 's a certain grandeur in the lack of decorations, a certain heroic strain in that young imagination of ours which finds nothing made to its hands, which has to invent its own traditions and

raise high into our morning-air, with a ringing hammer and nails, the castles in which we dwell. *Noblesse oblige* — Oxford must damnably do so. What a horrible thing not to rise to such examples! If you pay the pious debt to the last farthing of interest you may go through life with her blessing; but if you let it stand unhonoured you 're a worse barbarian than we! But for the better or worse, in a myriad private hearts, think how she must be loved! How the youthful sentiment of mankind seems visibly to brood upon her! Think of the young lives now taking colour in her cloisters and halls. Think of the centuries' tale of dead lads — dead alike with the end of the young days to which these haunts were a present world, and the close of the larger lives which the general mother-scene has dropped into less bottomless traps. What are those two young fellows kicking their heels over on the grass there? One of them has the *Saturday Review;* the other — upon my soul — the other has Artemus Ward! Where do they live, how do they live, to what end do they live? Miserable boys! How can they read Artemus Ward under those windows of Elizabeth? What do you think loveliest in all Oxford? The poetry of certain windows. Do you see that one yonder, the second of those lesser bays, with the broken cornice and the lattice? That used to be the window of my bosom friend a hundred years ago. Remind me to tell you the story of that broken cornice. Don't pretend it's not a common thing to have one's bosom friend at another college. Pray was I committed to common things? He was a charming fellow. By the way, he was a good deal like you. Of course

his cocked hat, his long hair in a black ribbon, his cinnamon velvet suit and his flowered waistcoat made a difference. We gentlemen used to wear swords."

There was really the touch of grace in my poor friend's divagations — the disheartened dandy had so positively turned rhapsodist and seer. I was particularly struck with his having laid aside the diffidence and self-consciousness of the first days of our acquaintance. He had become by this time a disembodied observer and critic; the shell of sense, growing daily thinner and more transparent, transmitted the tremor of his quickened spirit. He seemed to pick up acquaintances, in the course of our contemplations, merely by putting out his hand. If I left him for ten minutes I was sure to find him on my return in earnest conversation with some affable wandering scholar. Several young men with whom he had thus established relations invited him to their rooms and entertained him, as I gathered, with rather rash hospitality. For myself, I chose not to be present at these symposia; I shrank partly from being held in any degree responsible for his extravagance, partly from the pang of seeing him yield to champagne and an admiring circle. He reported such adventures with less keen a complacency than I had supposed he might use, but a certain method in his madness, a certain dignity in his desire to fraternise, appeared to save him from mischance. If they did n't think him a harmless lunatic they certainly thought him a celebrity of the Occident. Two things, however, grew evident — that he drank deeper than was good for him and that the flagrant freshness of his young patrons

rather interfered with his predetermined sense of the element of finer romance. At the same time it completed his knowledge of the place. Making the acquaintance of several tutors and fellows, he dined in hall in half a dozen colleges, alluding afterwards to these banquets with religious unction. One evening after a participation indiscreetly prolonged he came back to the hotel in a cab, accompanied by a friendly undergraduate and a physician and looking deadly pale. He had swooned away on leaving table and remained so rigidly unconscious as much to agitate his banqueters. The following twenty-four hours he of course spent in bed, but on the third day declared himself strong enough to begin afresh. On his reaching the street his strength once more forsook him, so that I insisted on his returning to his room. He besought me with tears in his eyes not to shut him up. "It's my last chance — I want to go back for an hour to that garden of Saint John's. Let me eat and drink — to-morrow I die." It seemed to me possible that with a Bath-chair the expedition might be accomplished. The hotel, it appeared, possessed such a convenience, which was immediately produced. It became necessary hereupon that we should have a person to propel the chair. As there was no one on the spot at liberty I was about to perform the office; but just as my patient had got seated and wrapped — he now had a perpetual chill — an elderly man emerged from a lurking-place near the door and, with a formal salute, offered to wait upon the gentleman. We assented, and he proceeded solemnly to trundle the chair before him. I recognised him as a vague per-

sonage whom I had observed to lounge shyly about the doors of the hotels, at intervals during our stay, with a depressed air of wanting employment and a poor semblance of finding it. He had once indeed in a half-hearted way proposed himself as an amateur cicerone for a tour through the colleges; and I now, as I looked at him, remembered with a pang that I had too curtly declined his ministrations. Since then his shyness, apparently, had grown less or his misery greater, for it was with a strange grim avidity that he now attached himself to our service. He was a pitiful image of shabby gentility and the dinginess of "reduced circumstances." He would have been, I suppose, some fifty years of age; but his pale haggard unwholesome visage, his plaintive drooping carriage and the irremediable disarray of his apparel seemed to add to the burden of his days and tribulations. His eyes were weak and bloodshot, his bold nose was sadly compromised, and his reddish beard, largely streaked with grey, bristled under a month's neglect of the razor. In all this rusty forlornness lurked a visible assurance of our friend's having known better days. Obviously he was the victim of some fatal depreciation in the market value of pure gentility. There had been something terribly affecting in the way he substituted for the attempt to touch the greasy rim of his antiquated hat some such bow as one man of the world might make another. Exchanging a few words with him as we went I was struck with the decorum of his accent. His fine whole voice should have been congruously cracked.

"Take me by some long roundabout way," said

Searle, "so that I may see as many college-walls as possible."

"You know," I asked of our attendant, "all these wonderful ins and outs?"

"I ought to, sir," he said, after a moment, with pregnant gravity. And as we were passing one of the colleges, "That used to be my place," he added.

At these words Searle desired him to stop and come round within sight. "You say that's *your* college?"

"The place might deny me, sir; but heaven forbid I should seem to take it ill of her. If you'll allow me to wheel you into the quad I'll show you my windows of thirty years ago."

Searle sat staring, his huge pale eyes, which now left nothing else worth mentioning in his wasted face, filled with wonder and pity. "If you'll be so kind," he said with great deference. But just as this perverted product of a liberal education was about to propel him across the threshold of the court he turned about, disengaged the mercenary hands, with one of his own, from the back of the chair, drew their owner alongside and turned to me. "While we're here, my dear fellow," he said, "be so good as to perform this service. You understand?" I gave our companion a glance of intelligence and we resumed our way. The latter showed us his window of the better time, where a rosy youth in a scarlet smoking-fez now puffed a cigarette at the open casement. Thence we proceeded into the small garden, the smallest, I believe, and certainly the sweetest, of all the planted places of Oxford. I pushed the chair along to a bench on the lawn, turned it round toward the front of the

college and sat down by it on the grass. Our attendant shifted mournfully from one foot to the other, his patron eyeing him open-mouthed. At length Searle broke out: "God bless my soul, sir, you don't suppose I expect you to stand! There's an empty bench."

"Thank you," said our friend, who bent his joints to sit.

"You English are really fabulous! I don't know whether I most admire or most abominate you! Now tell me: who are you? what are you? what brought you to this?"

The poor fellow blushed up to his eyes, took off his hat and wiped his forehead with an indescribable fabric drawn from his pocket. "My name's Rawson, sir. Beyond that it's a long story."

"I ask out of sympathy," said Searle. "I've a fellow-feeling. If you're a poor devil I'm a poor devil as well."

"I'm the poorer devil of the two," said the stranger with an assurance for once presumptuous.

"Possibly. I suppose an English poor devil's the poorest of all poor devils. And then you've fallen from a height. From a gentleman commoner — is that what they called you? — to a propeller of Bath-chairs. Good heavens, man, the fall's enough to kill you!"

"I did n't take it all at once, sir. I dropped a bit one time and a bit another."

"That's me, that's me!" cried Searle with all his seriousness.

"And now," said our friend, "I believe I can't drop any further."

"My dear fellow" — and Searle clasped his hand and shook it — "I too am at the very bottom of the hole."

Mr. Rawson lifted his eyebrows. "Well, sir, there's a difference between sitting in such a pleasant convenience and just trudging behind it!"

"Yes — there's a shade. But I'm at my last gasp, Mr. Rawson."

"I'm at my last penny, sir."

"Literally, Mr. Rawson?"

Mr. Rawson shook his head with large loose bitterness. "I've almost come to the point of drinking my beer and buttoning my coat figuratively; but I don't talk in figures."

Fearing the conversation might appear to achieve something like gaiety at the expense of Mr. Rawson's troubles, I took the liberty of asking him, with all consideration, how he made a living.

"I don't make a living," he answered with tearful eyes; "I can't make a living. I've a wife and three children — and all starving, sir. You would n't believe what I've come to. I sent my wife to her mother's, who can ill afford to keep her, and came to Oxford a week ago, thinking I might pick up a few half-crowns by showing people about the colleges. But it's no use. I have n't the assurance. I don't look decent. They want a nice little old man with black gloves and a clean shirt and a silver-headed stick. What do I look as if I knew about Oxford, sir?"

"Mercy on us," cried Searle, "why did n't you speak to us before?"

"I wanted to; half a dozen times I've been on the point of it. I knew you were Americans."

"And Americans are rich!" cried Searle, laughing. "My dear Mr. Rawson, American as I am I'm living on charity."

"And I'm exactly not, sir! There it is. I'm dying for the lack of that same. You say you're a pauper, but it takes an American pauper to go bowling about in a Bath-chair. America's an easy country."

"Ah me!" groaned Searle. "Have I come to the most delicious corner of the ancient world to hear the praise of Yankeeland?"

"Delicious corners are very well, and so is the ancient world," said Mr. Rawson; "but one may sit here hungry and shabby, so long as one is n't too shabby, as well as elsewhere. You'll not persuade me that it's not an easier thing to keep afloat yonder than here. I wish *I* were in Yankeeland, that's all!" he added with feeble force. Then brooding for a moment on his wrongs: "Have you a bloated brother? or you, sir? It matters little to you. But it has mattered to me with a vengeance! Shabby as I sit here I can boast that advantage—as he his five thousand a year. Being but a twelvemonth my elder he swaggers while I go thus. There's old England for you! A very pretty place for *him!*"

"Poor old England!" said Searle softly.

"Has your brother never helped you?" I asked.

"A five-pound note now and then! Oh I don't say there have n't been times when I have n't inspired an irresistible sympathy. I've not been what I should. I married dreadfully out of the way. But the devil of

it is that he started fair and I started foul; with the tastes, the desires, the needs, the sensibilities of a gentleman — and not another blessed 'tip.' I can't afford to live in England."

"*This* poor gentleman fancied a couple of months ago that he could n't afford to live in America," I fondly explained.

"I'd 'swap' — do you call it? — chances with him!" And Mr. Rawson looked quaintly rueful over his freedom of speech.

Searle sat supported there with his eyes closed and his face twitching for violent emotion, and then of a sudden had a glare of gravity. "My friend, you're a dead failure! Be judged! Don't talk about 'swapping.' Don't talk about chances. Don't talk about fair starts and false starts. I'm at that point myself that I've a right to speak. It lies neither in one's chance nor one's start to make one a success; nor in anything one's brother — however bloated — can do or can undo. It lies in one's character. You and I, sir, have *had* no character — that's very plain. We've been weak, sir; as weak as water. Here we are for it — sitting staring in each other's faces and reading our weakness in each other's eyes. We're of no importance whatever, Mr. Rawson!"

Mr. Rawson received this sally with a countenance in which abject submission to the particular affirmed truth struggled with the comparative propriety of his general rebellion against fate. In the course of a minute a due self-respect yielded to the warm comfortable sense of his being relieved of the cares of an attitude. "Go on, sir, go on," he said. "It's whole-

some doctrine." And he wiped his eyes with what seemed his sole remnant of linen.

"Dear, dear," sighed Searle, "I've made you cry! Well, we speak as from man to man. I should be glad to think you had felt for a moment the side-light of that great undarkening of the spirit which precedes — which precedes the grand illumination of death."

Mr. Rawson sat silent a little, his eyes fixed on the ground and his well-cut nose but the more deeply dyed by his agitation. Then at last looking up: "You're a very good-natured man, sir, and you'll never persuade me you don't come of a kindly race. Say what you please about a chance; when a man's fifty — degraded, penniless, a husband and father — a chance to get on his legs again is not to be despised. Something tells me that my luck may be in your country — which has brought luck to so many. I can come on the parish here of course, but I don't want to come on the parish. Hang it, sir, I want to hold up my head. I see thirty years of life before me yet. If only by God's help I could have a real change of air! It's a fixed idea of mine. I've had it for the last ten years. It's not that I'm a low radical. Oh I've no vulgar opinions. Old England's good enough for me, but I'm not good enough for old England. I'm a shabby man that wants to get out of a room full of staring gentlefolk. I'm for ever put to the blush. It's a perfect agony of spirit; everything reminds me of my younger and better self. The thing for me would be a cooling cleansing plunge into the unknowing and the unknown! I lie awake thinking of it."

Searle closed his eyes, shivering with a long-drawn

tremor which I hardly knew whether to take for an expression of physical or of mental pain. In a moment I saw it was neither. "Oh my country, my country, my country!" he murmured in a broken voice; and then sat for some time abstracted and lost. I signalled our companion that it was time we should bring our small session to a close, and he, without hesitating, possessed himself of the handle of the Bath-chair and pushed it before him. We had got halfway home before Searle spoke or moved. Suddenly in the High Street, as we passed a chop-house from whose open doors we caught a waft of old-fashioned cookery and other restorative elements, he motioned us to halt. "This is my last five pounds" — and he drew a note from his pocket-book. "Do me the favour, Mr. Rawson, to accept it. Go in there and order the best dinner they can give you. Call for a bottle of Burgundy and drink it to my eternal rest!"

Mr. Rawson stiffened himself up and received the gift with fingers momentarily irresponsive. But Mr. Rawson had the nerves of a gentleman. I measured the spasm with which his poor dispossessed hand closed upon the crisp paper, I observed his empurpled nostril convulsive under the other solicitation. He crushed the crackling note in his palm with a passionate pressure and jerked a spasmodic bow. "I shall not do you the wrong, sir, of anything but the best!" The next moment the door swung behind him.

Searle sank again into his apathy, and on reaching the hotel I helped him to get to bed. For the rest of the day he lay without motion or sound and beyond reach of any appeal. The doctor, whom I had constantly in

attendance, was sure his end was near. He expressed great surprise that he should have lasted so long; he must have been living for a month on the very dregs of his strength. Toward evening, as I sat by his bedside in the deepening dusk, he roused himself with a purpose I had vaguely felt gathering beneath his stupor. "My cousin, my cousin," he said confusedly. "Is she here?" It was the first time he had spoken of Miss Searle since our retreat from her brother's house, and he continued to ramble. "I was to have married her. What a dream! That day was like a string of verses — rhymed hours. But the last verse is bad measure. What's the rhyme to 'love'? *Above!* Was she a simple woman, a kind sweet woman? Or have I only dreamed it? She had the healing gift; her touch would have cured my madness. I want you to do something. Write three lines, three words: 'Good-bye; remember me; be happy.'" And then after a long pause: "It's strange a person in my state should have a wish. Why should one eat one's breakfast the day one's hanged? What a creature is man! What a farce is life! Here I lie, worn down to a mere throbbing fever-point; I breathe and nothing more, and yet I *desire!* My desire lives. If I could see her! Help me out with it and let me die."

Half an hour later, at a venture, I dispatched by post a note to Miss Searle: "*Your cousin is rapidly sinking. He asks to see you.*" I was conscious of a certain want of consideration in this act, since it would bring her great trouble and yet no power to face the trouble; but out of her distress I fondly hoped a sufficient force might be born. On the following day my

friend's exhaustion had become so great that I began to fear his intelligence altogether broken up. But toward evening he briefly rallied, to maunder about many things, confounding in a sinister jumble the memories of the past weeks and those of bygone years. "By the way," he said suddenly, "I've made no will. I have n't much to bequeath. Yet I have something." He had been playing listlessly with a large signet-ring on his left hand, which he now tried to draw off. "I leave you this" — working it round and round vainly — "if you can get it off. What enormous knuckles! There must be such knuckles in the mummies of the Pharaohs. Well, when I'm gone —! No, I leave you something more precious than gold — the sense of a great kindness. But I've a little gold left. Bring me those trinkets." I placed on the bed before him several articles of jewellery, relics of early foppery: his watch and chain, of great value, a locket and seal, some odds and ends of goldsmith's work. He trifled with them feebly for some moments, murmuring various names and dates associated with them. At last, looking up with clearer interest, "What has become," he asked, "of Mr. Rawson?"

"You want to see him?"

"How much are these things worth?" he went on without heeding me. "How much would they bring?" And he weighed them in his weak hands. "They're pretty heavy. Some hundred or so? Oh I'm richer than I thought! Rawson — Rawson — you want to get out of this awful England?"

I stepped to the door and requested the servant whom I kept in constant attendance in our adjacent

sitting-room to send and ascertain if Mr. Rawson were on the premises. He returned in a few moments, introducing our dismal friend. Mr. Rawson was pale even to his nose and derived from his unaffectedly concerned state an air of some distinction. I led him up to the bed. In Searle's eyes, as they fell on him, there shone for a moment the light of a human message.

"Lord have mercy!" gasped Mr. Rawson.

"My friend," said Searle, "there 's to be one American the less — so let there be at the same time one the more. At the worst you 'll be as good a one as I. Foolish me! Take these battered relics; you can sell them; let them help you on your way. They 're gifts and mementoes, but this is a better use. Heaven speed you! May America be kind to you. Be kind, at the last, to your own country!"

"Really this is too much; I can't," the poor man protested, almost scared and with tears in his eyes. "Do come round and get well and I 'll stop here. I 'll stay with you and wait on you."

"No, I 'm booked for my journey, you for yours. I hope you don't mind the voyage."

Mr. Rawson exhaled a groan of helpless gratitude, appealing piteously from so strange a windfall. "It 's like the angel of the Lord who bids people in the Bible to rise and flee!"

Searle had sunk back upon his pillow, quite used up; I led Mr. Rawson back into the sitting-room, where in three words I proposed to him a rough valuation of our friend's trinkets. He assented with perfect good-breeding; they passed into my possession and a second bank-note into his.

From the collapse into which this wondrous exercise of his imagination had plunged him my charge then gave few signs of being likely to emerge. He breathed, as he had said, and nothing more. The twilight deepened; I lighted the night-lamp. The doctor sat silent and official at the foot of the bed; I resumed my constant place near the head. Suddenly our patient opened his eyes wide. "She'll not come," he murmured. "Amen! she's an English sister." Five minutes passed; he started forward. "She's come, she's here!" he confidently quavered. His words conveyed to my mind so absolute an assurance that I lightly rose and passed into the sitting-room. At the same moment, through the opposite door, the servant introduced a lady. A lady, I say; for an instant she was simply such — tall pale dressed in deep mourning. The next instant I had uttered her name — "Miss Searle!" She looked ten years older.

She met me with both hands extended and an immense question in her face. "He has just announced you," I said. And then with a fuller consciousness of the change in her dress and countenance: "What has happened?"

"Oh death, death!" she wailed. "You and I are left."

There came to me with her words a sickening shock, the sense of poetic justice somehow cheated, defeated. "Your brother?" I panted.

She laid her hand on my arm and I felt its pressure deepen as she spoke. "He was thrown from his horse in the park. He died on the spot. Six days have passed. Six months!"

She accepted my support and a moment later we had entered the room and approached the bedside, from which the doctor withdrew. Searle opened his eyes and looked at her from head to foot. Suddenly he seemed to make out her mourning. "Already!" he cried audibly and with a smile, as I felt, of pleasure.

She dropped on her knees and took his hand. "Not for you, cousin," she whispered. "For my poor brother."

He started, in all his deathly longitude, as with a galvanic shock. "Dead! *He* dead! Life itself!" And then after a moment and with a slight rising inflexion: "You're free?"

"Free, cousin. Too sadly free. And now — *now* — with what use for freedom?"

He looked steadily into her eyes, dark in the heavy shadow of her musty mourning-veil. "For me wear colours!"

In a moment more death had come, the doctor had silently attested it, and she had burst into sobs.

We buried him in the little churchyard in which he had expressed the wish to lie; beneath one of the blackest and widest of English yews and the little tower than which none in all England has a softer and hoarier grey. A year has passed; Miss Searle, I believe, has begun to wear colours.

THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE

THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE

I

We had been talking about the masters who had achieved but a single masterpiece — the artists and poets who but once in their lives had known the divine afflatus and touched the high level of perfection. Our host had shown us a charming little cabinet picture by a painter whose name we had never heard and who, after this single spasmodic bid for fame, had appeared to relapse into obscurity and mediocrity. There was some discussion as to the frequency of this inconsequence; during which I noted H—— sit silent, finishing his cigar with a meditative air and looking at the picture, which was being handed round the table. "I don't know how common a case it is," he said at last, "but I've seen it. I've known a poor fellow who painted his one masterpiece, and who" — he added with a smile — "did n't even paint that. He made his bid for fame and missed it." We all knew H—— for a clever man who had seen much of men and manners and had a great stock of reminiscences. Some one immediately questioned him further, and while I was engrossed with the raptures of my neighbour over the precious object in circulation he was induced to tell his tale. If I were to doubt whether it would bear repeating I should only have

to remember how that charming woman our hostess, who had left the table, ventured back, in rustling rose-colour, to pronounce our lingering a want of gallantry, and, then finding us under the spell, sank into her chair in spite of our cigars and heard the story out so graciously that when the catastrophe was reached she glanced across and showed me a tear in each of her beautiful eyes.

It relates to my youth and to Italy: two very fine things! (H—— began.) I had arrived late in the evening at Florence and, while I finished my bottle of wine at supper, had fancied that, tired traveller though I was, I might pay such a place a finer compliment than by going vulgarly to bed. A narrow passage wandered darkly away out of the little square before my hotel and looked as if it bored into the heart of Florence. I followed it and at the end of ten minutes emerged upon a great piazza filled only with the mild autumn moonlight. Opposite rose the Palazzo Vecchio, like some huge civic fortress, with the great bell-tower springing from its embattled verge even as a mountain-pine from the edge of a cliff. At the base, in the great projected shadow, gleamed certain dim sculptures which I wonderingly approached. One of the images, on the left of the palace door, was a magnificent colossus who shone through the dusky air like a sentinel roused by some alarm and in whom I at once recognised Michael Angelo's famous David. I turned with a certain relief from his heroic sinister strength to a slender figure in bronze poised beneath the high light loggia which opposes the free and ele-

gant span of its arches to the dead masonry of the palace; a figure supremely shapely and graceful, markedly gentle almost, in spite of his holding out with his light nervous arm the snaky head of the slaughtered Gorgon. His name — as, unlike the great David, he still stands there — is Perseus, and you may read his story not in the Greek mythology but in the memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini. Glancing from one of these fine fellows to the other, I probably uttered some irrepressible commonplace of praise, for, as if provoked by my voice, a man rose from the steps of the loggia, where he had been sitting in the shadow, and addressed me in proper English — a small slim personage clad in some fashion of black velvet tunic (as it seemed) and with a mass of auburn hair, which shimmered in the moonlight, escaping from a little beretto of the *cinquecento*. In a tone of the most insinuating deference he proceeded to appeal to me for my "impressions." He was romantic, fantastic, slightly unreal. Hovering in that consecrated neighbourhood he might have passed for the genius of æsthetic hospitality — if the genius of æsthetic hospitality was n't commonly some shabby little custode who flourishes a calico pocket-handkerchief and openly resents the divided franc. This analogy was made none the less complete by his breaking into discourse as I threw myself diffidently back upon silence.

"I've known Florence long, sir, but I've never known her so lovely as to-night. It's as if the ghosts of her past were abroad in the empty streets. The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream made visible. Fancy the old Florentines stroll-

ing up in couples to pass judgement on the last performance of Michael, of Benvenuto! We should come in for a precious lesson if we might overhear what they say. The plainest burgher of them, in his cap and gown, had a taste in the matter. That was the prime of art, sir. The sun stood high in heaven, and his broad and equal blaze made the darkest places bright and the dullest eyes clear. We live in the evening of time. We grope in the grey dusk, carrying each our poor little taper of selfish and painful wisdom, holding it up to the great models and to the dim idea, and seeing nothing but overwhelming greatness and dimness. The days of illumination are gone. But do you take my refreshing idea" — and he grew suddenly almost familiar in this visionary fervour — "my idea that the light of that time rests upon us here for an hour? I've never seen the David so grand, the Perseus so fair! Even the inferior productions of John of Bologna and of Baccio Bandinelli seem to realise the artist's dream. I feel as if the moonlit air were charged with the secrets of the masters, and as if, standing here in religious attention, we might — well, witness a revelation!" Perceiving at this moment, I suppose, my halting comprehension reflected in my puzzled face, this interesting rhapsodist paused and blushed. Then with a melancholy smile: "You think me a moonstruck charlatan, I suppose. It's not my habit to hang about the piazza and pounce upon innocent tourists. But to-night, I confess, I'm under the charm. And then, somehow, I seemed to take you too for an artist!"

"I'm not an artist, I'm sorry to say, as you must

understand the term. But pray make no apologies. I *am* also under the charm, and your eloquent remarks," I declared, "have only deepened it."

"If you're not an artist you're worthy to be one!" he returned with flattering frankness. "A young man who arrives at Florence late in the evening and, instead of going prosaically to bed or hanging over the travellers' book at his hotel, walks forth without loss of time to render homage to these blest objects is a young man after my own heart!"

The mystery was suddenly solved; my friend was the most characteristic of compatriots. He would *have* to be one of "us," of the famished race — for we were at least a pair — to take the situation so to heart. "None the less so, I trust," I answered, "if the young man is a sordid New-Yorker."

"New-Yorkers have often been munificent patrons of art!" he answered urbanely.

For a moment I was alarmed. Was his irrepressible passion mere Yankee enterprise? — was he simply a desperate brother of the brush who had posted himself here to extort an "order" from a sauntering tourist? But I was n't called to defend myself. A great brazen note broke suddenly from the far-off summit of the bell-tower above us and sounded the first stroke of midnight. My companion started, apologised for detaining me and prepared to retire. But he seemed to offer so lively a promise of further entertainment that I was loth to part with him and suggested we should proceed homeward together. He cordially assented; so we turned out of the Piazza, passed down before the statued arcade of the Uffizi and came out

upon the Arno. What course we took I hardly remember, but we roamed far and wide for an hour, my companion delivering by snatches a positively moon-touched æsthetic lecture. I listened in puzzled fascination, wondering who the deuce he might be. He confessed with a melancholy but all-respectful headshake to an origin identical with my own. "We're the disinherited of Art! We're condemned to be superficial! We're excluded from the magic circle! The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit! Yes, we're wedded to imperfection! An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European! We lack the deeper sense! We have neither taste nor tact nor force! How *should* we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely conditions, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile."

"You seem fairly at home in exile," I made answer, "and Florence seems to me a very easy Siberia. But do you know my own thought? Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nursing air, of a kindly soil, of opportunity, of inspiration, of the things that help. The only thing that helps is to do something fine. There's no law in our glorious Constitution against that. Invent, create, achieve. No matter if you've to study fifty times as much as one of these. What else are you an artist for? Be you our Moses," I added, laughing and laying my hand on his shoulder, "and lead us out of the house of bondage!"

"Golden words, golden words, young man!" — my friend rose to it beautifully. "'Invent, create, achieve'! Yes, that's our business; I know it well. Don't take me, in heaven's name, for one of your barren complainers, of the falsely fastidious, who have neither talent nor faith! I'm at work!" — and he glanced about him and lowered his voice as if this were quite a peculiar secret — "I'm at work night and day. I've undertaken, believe me, a creation. I'm no Moses; I'm only a poor patient artist; but it would be a fine thing if I were to cause some slender stream of beauty to flow in our thirsty land! Don't think me a monster of conceit," he went on as he saw me smile at the avidity with which he adopted my illustration; "I confess that I *am* in one of those moods when great things seem possible! This is one of my — shall I say inspired? — nights: I dream waking! When the south-wind blows over Florence at midnight it seems to coax the soul from all the fair things locked away in her churches and galleries; it comes into my own little studio with the moonlight; it sets my heart beating too deeply for rest. You see I'm always adding a thought to my conception. This evening I felt I could n't sleep unless I had communed with the genius of Buonarotti!"

He seemed really to know his Florence through and through and had no need to tell me he loved her. I saw he was an old devotee and had taken her even from the first to his heart. "I owe her everything," he put it — "it's only since I came here that I've really lived, intellectually and æsthetically speaking. One by one all profane desires, all mere worldly aims, have

dropped away from me and left me nothing but my pencil, my little note-book" — he tapped his breast-pocket — "and the worship of the pure masters, those who were pure because they were innocent and those who were pure because they were strong!"

"And have you been very productive all this time?" I found myself too interested to keep from asking.

He was silent a while before replying. "Not in the vulgar sense! I've chosen never to manifest myself by imperfection. The good in every performance I've re-absorbed into the generative force of new creations; the bad — there's always plenty of that — I've religiously destroyed. I may say with some satisfaction that I've not added a grain to the rubbish of the world. As a proof of my conscientiousness" — and he stopped short, eyeing me with extraordinary candour, as if the proof were to be overwhelming — "I've never sold a picture! 'At least no merchant traffics in my heart!' Do you remember that divine line in Browning? My little studio has never been profaned by superficial feverish mercenary work. It's a temple of labour but of leisure! Art is long. If we work for ourselves of course we must hurry. If we work for *her* we must often pause. She can wait!"

This had brought us to my hotel door, somewhat to my relief, I confess, for I had begun to feel unequal to the society of a genius of this heroic strain. I left him, however, not without expressing a friendly hope that we should meet again. The next morning my curiosity had not abated; I was anxious to see him by common daylight. I counted on meeting him in one of the many art-haunts of the so rich little city, and I

was gratified without delay. I found him in the course of the morning in the Tribune of the Uffizi — that little treasure-chamber of world-famous things. He had turned his back on the Venus de' Medici and, with his arms resting on the rail that protects the pictures and his head buried in his hands, was lost in the contemplation of that superb neighbouring triptych of Andrea Mantegna — a work which has neither the material splendour nor the commanding force of some of its neighbours, but which, glowing there with the loveliness of patient labour, suits possibly a more constant need of the soul. I looked at the picture for some time over his shoulder; at last, with a heavy sigh, he turned away and our eyes met. As he recognised me he coloured for the consciousness of what I brought back: he recalled perhaps that he had made a fool of himself overnight. But I offered him my hand with a frankness that assured him I was no scoffer. I knew him by his great nimbus of red hair; otherwise he was much altered. His midnight mood was over and he looked as haggard as an actor by daylight. He was much older than I had supposed and had less bravery of costume and attitude. He seemed quite the poor patient artist he had proclaimed himself, and the fact that he had never sold a picture was more conceivable doubtless than commendable. His velvet coat was threadbare and his short slouched hat, of an antique pattern, revealed a rustiness that marked it an "original" and not one of the picturesque reproductions that members of his craft sometimes affect. His eye was mild and heavy, and his expression singularly gentle and acquiescent; the more so for a certain pale

facial spareness which I hardly knew whether to refer to the consuming fire of genius or to a meagre diet. A very little talk, however, cleared his brow and brought back his flow.

"And this is your first visit to these enchanted halls?" he cried. "Happy, thrice happy youth!" — with which, taking me by the arm, he prepared to lead me to each of the pre-eminent works in turn and show me the flower of the array. Before we left the Mantegna, however, I felt him squeeze me and give it a loving look. "*He* was not in a hurry," he murmured. "*He* knew nothing of 'raw Haste, half-sister to Delay'!" How sound a critic he might have been did n't seem to me even then to concern me — it so served that he was an amusing one; overflowing with opinions and theories, sympathies and aversions, with disquisition and gossip and anecdote. He inclined more than I approved to the sentimental proposition, was too fond, I thought, of superfine shades and of discovering subtle intentions and extracting quintessences. At moments too he plunged into the sea of metaphysics and floundered a while in waters that were not for my breasting. But his abounding knowledge and frequent felicities told a touching story of long attentive hours in all such worshipful companies; there was a reproach to my wasteful saunterings in his systematic and exhaustive attack. "There are two moods," I remember his saying, "in which we may walk through galleries — the critical and the ideal. They seize us at their pleasure, and we can never tell which is to take its turn. The critical, oddly, is the genial one, the friendly, the condescending. It relishes

the pretty trivialities of art, its vulgar cleverness, its conscious graces. It has a kindly greeting for anything which looks as if, according to his light, the painter had enjoyed doing it — for the little Dutch cabbages and kettles, for the taper fingers and breezy mantles of late-coming Madonnas, for the little blue-hilled broken-bridged pastoral classical landscapes. Then there are the days of fierce fastidious longing — solemn church-feasts of the taste or the faith — when all vulgar effort and all petty success is a weariness and everything but the best, the best of the best, disgusts. In these hours we're relentless aristocrats of attitude. We'll not take Michael for granted, we'll not swallow Raphael whole!"

The gallery of the Uffizi is not only rich in its possessions, but peculiarly fortunate in that fine architectural accident or privilege which unites it — with the breadth of river and city between them — to the princely extent of the Pitti. The Louvre and the Vatican hardly give you such a sense of sustained enclosure as those long passages projected over street and stream to establish an inviolate transition between the two palaces of art. We paced the clear tunnel in which those precious drawings by eminent hands hang chaste and grey above the swirl and murmur of the yellow Arno, and reached the grand-ducal, the palatial saloons. Grand-ducal as they are, they must be pronounced imperfect show-rooms, since, thanks to their deep-set windows and their massive mouldings, it is rather a broken light that reaches the pictured walls. But here the masterpieces hang thick, so that you see them in a deep diffused lustre of their

own. And the great chambers, with their superb dim ceilings, their outer wall in splendid shadow and the sombre opposite glow of toned canvas and gleaming gold, make themselves almost as fine a picture as the Titians and Raphaels they imperfectly reveal. We lingered briefly before many a Raphael and Titian; but I saw my friend was impatient and I suffered him at last to lead me directly to the goal of our journey — the most tenderly fair of Raphael's virgins, the Madonna of the Chair. Of all the fine pictures of the world, it was to strike me at once as the work with which criticism has least to do. None betrays less effort, less of the mechanism of success and of the irrepressible discord between conception and result that sometimes faintly invalidates noble efforts. Graceful, human, near to our sympathies as it is, it has nothing of manner, of method, nothing almost of style; it blooms there in a softness as rounded and as instinct with harmony as if it were an immediate exhalation of genius. The figure imposes on the spectator a spell of submission which he scarce knows whether he has given to heavenly purity or to earthly charm. He is intoxicated with the fragrance of the tenderest blossom of maternity that ever bloomed among men.

"That's what I call a fine picture," said my companion after we had gazed a while in silence. "I've a right to say so, for I've copied it so often and so carefully that I could repeat it now with my eyes shut. Other works are of Raphael: this *is* Raphael himself. Others you can praise, you can qualify, you can measure, explain, account for: this you can only love and

admire. I don't know in what seeming he walked here below while this divine mood was upon him; but after it surely he could do nothing but die — this world had nothing more to teach him. Think of it a while, my friend, and you'll admit that I 'm not raving. Think of his seeing that spotless image not for a moment, for a day, in a happy dream or a restless fever-fit, not as a poet in a five minutes' frenzy — time to snatch his phrase and scribble his immortal stanza; but for days together, while the slow labour of the brush went on, while the foul vapours of life interposed and the fancy ached with tension, fixed, radiant, distinct, as we see it now! What a master, certainly! But ah what a seer!"

"Don't you imagine," I fear I profanely asked, "that he had a model, and that some pretty young woman —"

"As pretty a young woman as you please! It does n't diminish the miracle. He took his hint of course, and the young woman possibly sat smiling before his canvas. But meanwhile the painter's idea had taken wings. No lovely human outline could charm it to vulgar fact. He saw the fair form made perfect; he rose to the vision without tremor, without effort of wing; he communed with it face to face and resolved into finer and lovelier truth the purity which completes it as the fragrance completes the rose. That's what they call idealism; the word's vastly abused, but the thing's good. It's my own creed at any rate. Lovely Madonna, model at once and muse, I call you to witness that I too am an idealist!"

"An idealist then" — and I really but wanted to

draw him further out — "an idealist is a gentleman who says to Nature in the person of a beautiful girl: 'Go to, you're all wrong! Your fine's coarse, your bright's dim, your grace is *gaucherie*. This is the way you should have done it!' Is n't the chance against him?"

He turned on me at first almost angrily — then saw that I was but sowing the false to reap the true. "Look at that picture," he said, "and cease your irreverent mockery! Idealism is *that!* There's no explaining it; one must feel the flame. It says nothing to Nature, or to any beautiful girl, that they won't both forgive. It says to the fair woman: 'Accept me as your artist-friend, lend me your beautiful face, trust me, help me, and your eyes shall be half my masterpiece.' No one so loves and respects the rich realities of nature as the artist whose imagination intensifies them. He knows what a fact may hold — whether Raphael knew, you may judge by his inimitable portrait, behind us there, of Tommaso Inghirami — but his fancy hovers above it as Ariel in the play hovers above the sleeping prince. There's only one Raphael, but an artist may still be an artist. As I said last night, the days of illumination are gone; visions are rare; we've to look long to have them. But in meditation we may still cultivate the ideal; round it, smooth it, perfect it. The result, the result" — here his voice faltered suddenly and he fixed his eyes for a moment on the picture; when they met my own again they were full of tears — "the result may be less than this, but still it may be good, it may be *great!*" he cried with vehemence. "It may hang somewhere, through all the years, in goodly

company, and keep the artist's memory warm. Think of being known to mankind after some such fashion as this; of keeping pace with the restless centuries and the changing world; of living on and on in the cunning of an eye and a hand that belong to the dust of ages, a delight and a law to remote generations; of making beauty more and more a force and purity more and more an example!"

"Heaven forbid," I smiled, "that I should take the wind out of your sails! But does n't it occur to you that besides being strong in his genius Raphael was happy in a certain good faith of which we 've lost the trick? There are people, I know, who deny that his spotless Madonnas are anything more than pretty blondes of that period, enhanced by the Raphaelesque touch, which they declare to be then as calculating and commercial as any other. Be that as it may, people's religious and æsthetic needs went arm in arm, and there was, as I may say, a demand for the Blessed Virgin, visible and adorable, which must have given firmness to the artist's hand. I 'm afraid there 's no demand now."

My friend momentarily stared — he shivered and shook his ears under this bucketful of cold water. But he bravely kept up his high tone. "There 's always a demand — that ineffable type is one of the eternal needs of man's heart; only pious souls long for it in silence, almost in shame. Let it appear and their faith grows brave. How *should* it appear in this corrupt generation? It can't be made to order. It could indeed when the order came trumpet-toned from the lips of the Church herself and was addressed

to genius panting with inspiration. But it can spring now only from the soil of passionate labour and culture. Do you really fancy that while from time to time a man of complete artistic vision is born into the world such an image can perish? The man who paints it has painted everything. The subject admits of every perfection — form, colour, expression, composition. It can be as simple as you please and yet as rich; as broad and free and yet as full of delicate detail. Think of the chance for flesh in the little naked nestling child, irradiating divinity; of the chance for drapery in the chaste and ample garment of the mother. Think of the great story you compress into that simple theme. Think above all of the mother's face and its ineffable suggestiveness, of the mingled burden of joy and trouble, the tenderness turned to worship and the worship turned to far-seeing pity. Then look at it all in perfect line and lovely colour, breathing truth and beauty and mastery."

"Anch' io son pittore!" I laughed. "Unless I'm mistaken *you* have a masterpiece on the stocks. If you put all that in you'll do more than Raphael himself did. Let me know when your picture's finished, and wherever in the wide world I may be I'll post back to Florence and pay my respects to — the *Madonna of the future!*"

His face, at this, had a flush of consciousness, and he seemed to sigh half in protest, half in resignation. "I don't often mention my picture by name. I detest this modern custom of premature publicity. A great work needs silence, privacy, mystery. And then, do you know, people are so cruel, so frivolous, so unable

to imagine a man's wishing to paint a Madonna at this time of day, that I've been laughed at, positively laughed at, sir!" — and his poor guilty blush deepened. "I don't know what has prompted me to be so frank and trustful with you. You look as if you would n't laugh at me. My dear young man" — and he laid his hand on my arm — "I'm worthy of respect. Whatever my limitations may be I'm honest. There's nothing grotesque in a pure ambition or in a life devoted to it."

II

THERE was something so admirably candid in his look and tone that further questions seemed to savour just then of indiscretion. I had repeated opportunity to put as many as I would, however, for after this we spent much time together. Daily, for a fortnight, we met under agreement that he should help me to intimacy with the little treasure-city. He knew it so well and had studied it with so pious a patience, he was so deeply versed both in its greater and its minor memories, he had become in short so fond and familiar a Florentine, that he was an ideal *valet de place* and I was glad enough to leave dryer documents at home and learn what I wanted from his lips and his example. He talked of Florence as a devoted old lover might still speak of an old incomparable mistress who remained proof against time; he liked to describe how he had lost his heart to her at first sight. "It's the fashion to make all cities of the feminine gender, but as a rule it's a monstrous mistake. Is Florence of the same sex as New York, as Chicago, as London, as Liverpool? She's the sole perfect lady of them all; one feels toward her as some sensitive aspiring youth feels to some beautiful older woman with a 'history.' She fills you with a presumptuous gallantry." This disinterested passion seemed to stand my friend instead of the common social ties; he led a lonely life and cared for nothing but his work. I was duly flat-

tered by his having taken my uninstructed years into his favour and by his generous sacrifice of precious hours to my society. We spent them in historic streets and consecrated nooks, in churches and convents and galleries, spent them above all in study of those early paintings in which Florence is so rich, returning ever and anon, with restless sympathies, to find in these tender blossoms of art a fragrance and savour more precious than the full-fruited knowledge of the later works. We lingered often in the mortuary chapel of San Lorenzo, where we watched Michael Angelo's dim-visaged warrior sit like some awful Genius of Doubt and brood behind his eternal mask upon the mysteries of life. We stood more than once in the little convent chambers where Fra Angelico wrought as if an angel indeed had held his hand, and gathered that sense of scattered dews and early bird-notes which makes an hour among his relics resemble a morning stroll in some monkish garden. We did all this and much more — wandered into obscure shrines, damp courts and dusty palace-rooms, in quest of lingering hints of fresco and lurking treasures of sculpture.

I was more and more impressed with my companion's remarkable singleness of purpose. Everything became a pretext for one of his high-flown excursions. Nothing could be seen or said that did n't lead him sooner or later to a glowing discourse on the true, the beautiful and the good. If my friend was not a genius he was certainly a natural rhapsodist, or even a harmless madman; and I found the play of his temper, his humour and his candid and unworldly character as quaint as if he had been a creature from another

planet. He seemed indeed to know very little of this one, and lived and moved altogether in his boundless province of art. A creature more unsullied by the accidents of life it's impossible to conceive, and I sometimes questioned the reality of an artistic virtue, an æsthetic purity, on which some profane experience had n't rubbed off a little more. It was hard to have to accept him as of our own hard-headed stock; but after all there could be no better sign of his American star than the completeness of his reaction in favour of vague profits. The very heat of his worship was a mark of conversion; those born within sight of the temple take their opportunities more for granted. He had moreover all our native mistrust for intellectual discretion and our native relish for sonorous superlatives. As a critic he rather ignored proportion and degree; his recognitions had a generous publicity, his discriminations were all discoveries. The small change of appreciation seemed to him in fine no coin for a gentleman to handle; and yet with all this overflow of opinion and gesture he remained in himself a mystery. His professions were practically, somehow, all masks and screens, and his personal allusions, as to his ambiguous background, mere wavings of the dim lantern. He was modest and proud, in other words, and never spoke of his domestic matters. He was evidently poor, and yet must have had some slender independence, since he could afford to make so merry over the fact that his culture of ideal beauty had never brought him a penny. His poverty, I supposed, was his motive for neither inviting me to his lodging nor mentioning its whereabouts. We met

either in some public place or at my hotel, where I entertained him as freely as I might without appearing to be prompted by charity. He appeared for the most part hungry, and this was his nearest approach to human grossness. I made a point of never seeming to cross a certain line with him, but, each time we met, I ventured to make some respectful allusion to the *magnum opus*, to enquire, if I might, as to its health and progress. "We're getting on, with the Lord's help," he would say with a bravery that never languished; "I think we can't be said not to be doing well. You see I've the grand advantage that I lose no time. These hours I spend with you are pure profit. They bring me in a harvest of incentives. Just as the truly religious soul is always at worship the genuine artist is always in labour. He takes his property wherever he finds it — he learns some precious secret from every object that stands up in the light. If you but knew — in connexion with something to be done — of the rapture of observing and remembering, of applying one's notes. I take in at every glance some hint for light, for colour, for style. When I get home I pour out my treasures into the lap of my Madonna. Oh I'm not idle! *Nulla dies sine linea.*"

III

I HAD been introduced meanwhile to an American lady whose drawing-room had long formed an attractive place of reunion for strangers of supposed distinction. She lived on a fourth floor and was not rich; but she offered her visitors very good tea, little cakes at option and conversation not quite to match. Her conversation had mainly a high æsthetic pitch, for Mrs. Coventry was famously "artistic." Her apartment was a sort of miniature Pitti Palace. She possessed "early masters" by the dozen — a cluster of Peruginos in her dining-room, a Giotto in her boudoir, an Andrea del Sarto over her drawing-room chimney-piece. Surrounded by these treasures and by innumerable bronzes, mosaics, majolica dishes, and little worm-eaten diptychs covered with angular saints on gilded backgrounds, she enjoyed the dignity of a social high-priestess of the arts. She always wore on her bosom a huge, if reduced, copy of the Madonna della Seggiola. Gaining her ear quietly one evening I asked her whether she knew among our compatriots in the place a certain eccentric but charming Mr. Theobald.

"Know him, know poor Theobald?" — her answer was as public as if I had owed it to the bell-crier. "All Florence knows him, his flame-coloured locks, his black velvet coat, his interminable harangues on the Beautiful and his wondrous Madonna that mortal

eye has never seen and that mortal patience has quite given up expecting."

"Really," I asked, "you don't believe in his wondrous Madonna?"

"My dear ingenuous youth," rejoined my shrewd friend, "has he made a convert of you? Well, we all believed in him once; he came down upon Florence — that is on our little colony here — and took the town by storm. Another Raphael, at the very least, had been born among men, and our poor dear barbarous country was to have the credit of him. Had n't he the very hair of Raphael flowing down on his shoulders? The hair, alas — it 's his difficulty — appears to have to do duty for the head! We swallowed him whole, however; we hung on his lips and proclaimed his genius from the house-tops. The women were dying to sit to him for their portraits and be made immortal like Leonardo's Gioconda. We decided that his manner was a good deal like Leonardo's — 'esoteric' and indescribable and fascinating. Well, it has all remained esoteric, and nobody can describe what nobody has ever seen. The months, the years have passed and the miracle has hung fire; our master has never produced his masterpiece. He has passed hours in the galleries and churches, posturing, musing and gazing; he has talked more about his subject — about every subject — than any human being before has ever talked about anything, but has never put brush to canvas. We had all subscribed, as it were, to the great performance; but as it never came off people began to ask for their money again. I was one of the last of the faithful; I carried devotion so far as to sit

to him for my head. If you could have seen the horrible creature he made of me you 'd recognise that even a woman with no more vanity than will tie her bonnet straight must have cooled off then. The man did n't know the very alphabet of drawing. His strong point, he intimated, was his sentiment; but is it a consolation, when one has been painted a fright, to know that the man has particularly enjoyed doing it? One by one, I confess, we fell away from the faith, and Mr. Theobald did n't lift his little finger to preserve us. At the first hint that we were tired of waiting and that we should like the show to begin he was off in a huff. 'Great work requires time, contemplation, privacy, mystery! O ye of little faith!' We answered that we did n't insist on a great work; that the five-act tragedy might come at his convenience; that we merely asked for something to keep us from yawning, some light little *lever de rideau*. On that the poor dear man took his stand as a genius misconceived and persecuted, a martyr to his opinions, and washed his hands of us from that hour! No, I believe he does me the honour to consider me the head and front of the conspiracy formed to nip his glory in the bud — a bud that has taken twenty years to blossom. Ask him if he knows me, and he 'll tell you I 'm a horribly ugly old woman who has vowed his destruction because he does n't see his way to paint her in the style of Titian's Flora. I 'm afraid that since then he has had none but chance followers, innocent strangers like yourself, who have taken him at his word. The mountain 's still in labour; I have n't heard that the mouse has been born. I pass him once in a while in

the galleries, and he fixes his great dark eyes on me with a sublimity of indifference, as if I were a bad copy of a Sassoferrato! It 's ever so long now since I heard that he was making studies for a Madonna who was to be a résumé of all the other Madonnas of the Italian school — like that antique Venus who borrowed a nose from one great image and an ankle from another. It 's certainly a grand idea. The parts may be fine, but when I think of my unhappy portrait I tremble for the whole. He has communicated this *trouvaille*, under pledge of solemn secrecy, to fifty chosen spirits, to every one he has ever been able to buttonhole for five minutes. I suppose he wants to get an order for it, and he 's not to blame; for goodness knows how he lives. I see by your blush" — my friend freely proceeded — "that you 've been honoured with his confidence. You need n't be ashamed, my dear young man; a man of your age is none the worse for a certain generous credulity. Only allow me this word of advice: keep your credulity out of your pockets! Don't pay for the picture till it 's delivered. You have n't been treated to a peep at it, I imagine? No more have your fifty predecessors in the faith. There are people who doubt there 's any picture to be seen. I should n't myself be surprised if, when one runs him to earth, one finds scarce more than in that terrible little tale of Balzac's — a mere mass of incoherent scratches and daubs, a jumble of dead paint!"

I listened to this bold sketch in silent wonder. It had a painfully plausible sound, it set the seal on shy suspicions of my own. My hostess was satirical, but was neither unveracious nor vindictive. I deter-

mined to let my judgement wait upon events. Possibly she was right, but if she was wrong she was cruelly wrong. Her version of my friend's eccentricities made me impatient to see him again and examine him in the light of public opinion. On our next meeting I at once asked him if he knew Mrs. Coventry. He laid his hand on my arm with a sadder, though perhaps sharper, look than had ever yet come into his face. "Has she got *you* into training? She's a most vain woman. She's empty and scheming and she pretends to be serious and kind. She prattles about Giotto's second manner and Vittoria Colonna's liaison with 'Michael' — one would suppose Michael lived across the way and was expected in to take a hand at whist — but she knows as little about art, and about the conditions of production, as I know about the stock-market. She profanes sacred things," he more vehemently went on. "She cares for you only as some one to hand teacups in that horrible humbugging little parlour with its trumpery Peruginos! If you can't dash off a new picture every three days and let her hand it round among her guests she tells them you're a low fraud and that they must have nothing to do with you."

This attempt of mine to test Mrs. Coventry's understanding of our poor friend was made in the course of a late afternoon walk to the quiet old church of San Miniato, on one of the hill-tops which directly overlook the city, from whose gates you are guided to it by a stony and cypress-bordered walk, the most fitting of avenues to a shrine. No spot is more propitious to rest and thought[1] than the broad terrace in front

[1] 1869.

of the church, where, lounging against the parapet, you may glance in slow alternation from the black and yellow marbles of the church-façade, seamed and cracked with time and wind-sown with a tender flora of their own, down to the full domes and slender towers of Florence and over to the blue sweep of the wide-mouthed cup of mountains in whose hollow this choicest handful of the spoils of time has been stored away for keeping. I had proposed, as a diversion from the painful memories evoked by Mrs. Coventry's name, that Theobald should go with me the next evening to the opera, where some work rarely played was to be given. He declined, as I half-expected, for I had noted that he regularly kept his evenings in reserve and never alluded to his manner of passing them. "You've reminded me before," I put to him, "of that charming speech of the Florentine painter in Alfred de Musset's 'Lorenzaccio': '*I do no harm to any one. I pass my days in my studio. On Sunday I go to the Annunziata or to Santa Maria; the monks think I have a voice; they dress me in a white gown and a red cap, and I take a share in the choruses; sometimes I do a little solo: these are the only times I go into public. In the evening, I visit my sweetheart; when the night is fine, we pass it on her balcony.*' I don't know whether you've a sweetheart or whether she has a balcony. But if you *are* so happy it's certainly better than trying to hold out against a third-rate prima donna."

He made no immediate answer, but at last he turned to me solemnly. "Can you look upon a beautiful woman with reverent eyes?"

"Really," I said, "I don't pretend to be sheepish, but I should be sorry to think myself impudent." And I asked him what in the world he meant. When at last I had assured him that if the question was of his giving me such an exhibition I would accept it on the terms he should impose, he made known to me — with an air of religious mystery — that it was in his power to introduce me to the most beautiful woman in Italy: "A beauty with a beautiful soul."

"Upon my word," I said, "you're extremely fortunate. I'm not less so, but you do keep cards up your sleeve."

"This woman's beauty," he returned, "is a revelation, a lesson, a morality, a poem! It's my daily study." Of course after this I lost no time in reminding him of what, before we parted, had taken the shape of a promise. "I feel somehow," he had said, "as if it were a violation of that privacy in which I've always studied and admired her. Therefore what I'm doing for you — well, my friend, is friendship. No hint of her existence has ever fallen from my lips. But with too great a familiarity we're apt to lose a sense of the real value of things, and you'll perhaps throw some new light on what I show you and offer a fresher appreciation."

We went accordingly by appointment to a certain ancient house in the heart of Florence — the precinct of the Mercato Vecchio — and climbed a dark steep staircase to its highest flight. Theobald's worshipped human type seemed hung as far above the line of common vision as his artistic ideal was lifted over the usual practice of men. He passed without knocking

into the dark vestibule of a small apartment where, opening an inner door, he ushered me into a small saloon. The room affected me as mean and sombre, though I caught a glimpse of white curtains swaying gently at an open window. At a table, near a lamp, sat a woman dressed in black, working at a piece of embroidery. As my guide entered she looked up with a serene smile; then, seeing me, she made a movement of surprise and rose with stately grace. He stepped nearer, taking her hand and kissing it with an indescribable air of immemorial usage. As he bent his head she looked at me askance and had, I thought, a perfectly human change of colour.

"This is the sublime Serafina!" — Theobald frankly waved me forward. "And this is a friend and a lover of the arts," he added, introducing me. I received a smile, a curtsey and a request to be seated.

The most beautiful woman in Italy was a person of a generous Italian type and of a great simplicity of demeanour. Seated again at her lamp with her embroidery, she seemed to have nothing whatever to say. Theobald, bending to her in a sort of Platonic ecstasy, asked her a dozen paternally tender questions about her health, her state of mind, her occupations and the progress of her needlework, which he examined minutely and summoned me to admire. It was one of the pieces of some ecclesiastical vestment — ivory satin wrought with an elaborate design of silver and gold. She made answer in a full rich voice, but with a brevity I could n't know whether to attribute to native reserve or to the profane constraint of my presence. She had been that morning to con-

fession; she had also been to market and had bought a chicken for dinner. She felt very happy; she had nothing to complain of except that the people for whom she was making her vestment and who furnished her materials should be willing to put such rotten silver thread into the garment, as one might say, of the Lord. From time to time, as she took her slow stitches, she raised her eyes and covered me with a glance which seemed at first to express but a placid curiosity, but in which, as I saw it repeated, I thought I perceived the dim glimmer of an attempt to establish an understanding with me at the expense of our companion. Meanwhile, as mindful as possible of Theobald's injunction of reverence, I considered the lady's personal claims to the fine compliment he had paid her.

That she was indeed a beautiful woman I recognised as soon as I had recovered from the surprise of finding her without the freshness of youth. Her appearance was of the sort which, in losing youth, loses little of its greater merit, expressed for the most part as it was in form and structure and, as Theobald would have said, in "composition." She was broad and ample, low-browed and large-eyed, dark and pale. Her thick brown hair hung low beside her cheek and ear and seemed to drape her head with a covering as chaste and formal as the veil of a nun. The poise and carriage of this head were admirably free and noble, and all the more effective that their freedom was at moments discreetly corrected by a little sanctimonious droop which harmonised admirably with the level gaze of her dark and quiet eye. A strong serene phys-

ical nature, with the placid temper which comes of no nerves and no troubles, seemed this lady's comfortable portion. She was dressed in plain dull black, save for a dark blue kerchief which was folded across her bosom and exposed a glimpse of her massive throat. Over this kerchief was suspended a little silver cross. I admired her greatly, yet with a considerable reserve. A certain mild intellectual apathy was the very mark of her complexion and form, and always seemed to round and enrich them; but this bourgeoise Egeria, if I viewed her right, betrayed rather a vulgar stagnation of mind. There might have once been a dim spiritual light in her face, but it had long since begun to wane. And furthermore, in plain prose, she was growing stout. My disappointment amounted very nearly to complete disenchantment when Theobald, as if to facilitate my covert inspection, declaring that the lamp was very dim and that she would ruin her eyes without more light, rose and addressed himself to a couple of candles on the mantelpiece, which he lighted and transferred to the table. In this improved clearness I made our hostess out a very mature person. She was neither haggard nor worn nor grey, but she was thick and coarse. The beautiful soul my friend had promised me seemed scarce worth making such a point of; it dwelt in no deeper principle than some accident of quietude, some matronly mildness of lip and brow. I should have been ready even to pronounce her sanctified bend of the head nothing more inward than the trick of a person always working at embroidery. It might have been even a slightly more sinister symptom, for in spite of her apparently

admirable dulness this object of our all-candid homage practically dropped a hint that she took the situation rather less seriously than her friend. When he rose to light the candles she looked across at me with a quick intelligent smile and tapped her forehead with her forefinger; then, as from a sudden feeling of compassionate loyalty to poor Theobald I preserved a blank face, she gave a little shrug and resumed her work.

What was the relation of this singular couple? Was he the most ardent of friends or the most discreet of lovers? Did she regard him as an eccentric swain whose benevolent admiration of her beauty she was not ill-pleased to humour at the small cost of having him climb into her little parlour and gossip of summer nights? With her decent and sombre dress, her simple gravity and that fine piece of priestly stitching, she looked like some pious lay-member of a sisterhood living by special permission outside her convent walls. Or was she maintained here aloft by her admirer in comfortable leisure, so that he might have before him the perfect eternal type, uncorrupted and untarnished by the struggle for existence? Her shapely hands, I observed, were very fair and white; they lacked the traces of what is called honest toil.

"And the pictures, how do they come on?" she asked of Theobald after a long pause.

"Oh in their own fine quiet way! I've here a friend whose sympathy and encouragement give me new faith and ardour."

Our hostess turned to me, gazed at me a moment rather inscrutably, and then, repeating the vivid

reference to the contents of our poor friend's head she had used a minute before, "He has a magnificent genius!" she said with perfect gravity.

"I'm inclined to think so" — I was amused in spite of myself.

"Eh, why do you smile?" she cried. "If you doubt what I say you must see the *santo bambino!*" And she took the lamp and conducted me to the other side of the room, where, on the wall, in a plain black frame, hung a large drawing in red chalk. Beneath it was attached a little bowl for holy-water. The drawing represented a very young child, entirely naked, half-nestling back against his mother's gown, but with his two little arms outstretched as in the act of benediction. It had been thrown off with singular freedom and directness, but was none the less vivid with the sacred bloom of infancy. A dimpled elegance and grace, which yet did n't weaken its expression, recalled the touch of Correggio. "That's what he can do!" said my hostess. "It's the blessed little boy I lost. It's his very image, and the Signor Teobaldo, a generous person if there ever was one, gave it me as a gift. He has given me many things besides!"

I looked at the picture for some time — certainly it had a charm. Turning back to our friend I assured him that if it were hung amid the drawings in the Uffizi and labelled with a glorious name it would bravely hold its own. My praise seemed to give him joy; he pressed my hands — his eyes filled with tears. I had apparently quickened his desire to expatiate on the history of the drawing, for he rose and took leave of our companion, kissing her hand with

the same mild ardour as before. It occurred to me that the offer of a similar piece of gallantry on my own part might help me to know what manner of woman she was. When she felt my intention she withdrew her hand, dropped her eyes solemnly and made me a severe curtsey. Theobald took my arm and led me rapidly into the street.

"And what do you think of the sublime Serafina?" he cried with anxiety.

"She's certainly a fine figure of a woman," I answered without ceremony.

He eyed me an instant askance and then seemed hurried along by the current of remembrance. "You should have seen the mother and the child together, seen them as I first saw them — the mother with her head draped in a shawl, a divine trouble in her face and the bambino pressed to her bosom. You'd have said, I'm sure, that Raphael had found his match in common chance. I was coming back one summer night from a long walk in the country when I met this apparition at the city gate. The woman held out her hand and I hardly knew whether to say 'What do you want?' or to fall down and worship. She asked for a little money and received what I gave her with the holy sweetness with which the Santissima Vergine receives the offerings of the faithful. I saw she was beautiful and pale — she might have stepped out of the stable of Bethlehem! I gave her money and helped her on her way into the town. I had guessed her story. She too was a maiden mother, but she had been turned out into the world in her shame. I felt in all my pulses that here was my subject marvellously

realised. It was as if I had had like one of the monkish artists of old a miraculous vision. I rescued the poor creatures, cherished them, watched them as I would have done some precious work of art, some lovely fragment of fresco discovered in a mouldering cloister. In a month — as if to deepen and sanctify the sadness and sweetness of it all — the poor little child died. When she felt he was going she lifted him up to me for ten minutes — so as not to lose him *all* — and I made that sketch. You saw a feverish haste in it, I suppose; I wanted to spare the poor little mortal the pain of his position. After that I doubly valued the mother. She's the simplest, sweetest, most natural creature that ever bloomed in this brave old land of Italy. She lives in the memory of her child, in her gratitude for the scanty kindness I've been able to show her, and in her simple instinctive imperturbable piety. She's not even conscious of her beauty; my admiration has never made her vain. Heaven yet knows that I've made no secret what I think of it. You must have taken in the extraordinary clearness and modesty of her look. Was there ever such a truly virginal brow, such a natural classic elegance in the wave of the hair and the arch of the forehead? I've studied her; I may say I know her. I've absorbed her little by little, I've made her my own, my mind's stamped and imbued, and I've determined now to clinch the impression. I shall at last invite her to sit for me!"

"'At last — at last'?" I repeated in amazement. "Do you mean she has never done so yet?"

"I've not really — since that first time — made her

pose," he said with a shade of awkwardness. "I've taken notes, you know; I've got my grand fundamental impression. That's the great thing! But I've not actually put her to the inconvenience — so to call it — to which I'd have put a common model."

What had become for the moment of my perception and my tact I'm at a loss to say; in their absence I was unable to repress a headlong exclamation. I was destined to regret it. We had stopped at a turning and beneath a lamp. "My poor friend," I exclaimed, laying my hand on his shoulder, "you've *dawdled!* She's an old, old woman — for a maiden mother."

It was as if I had brutally struck him; I shall never forget the long slow almost ghastly look of pain with which he answered me. "Dawdled? — old, old?" he stammered. "Are you joking?"

"Why, my dear fellow, I suppose you don't take her for anything *but* mature?"

He drew a long breath and leaned against a house, looked at me with questioning protesting reproachful eyes. At last starting forward and grasping my arm: "Answer me solemnly: does she seem to you really and truly old? Is she wrinkled, is she faded — am I blind?" he demanded.

Then at last I understood the immensity of his illusion; how, one by one, the noiseless years had ebbed away and left him brooding in charmed inaction, for ever preparing for a work for ever deferred. It struck me almost as a kindness now to tell him the plain truth. "I should be sorry to say you're blind," I returned, "but I think you're rather unfortunately deceived. You've lost time in effortless contempla-

tion. Your friend was once young and fresh and virginal; but you see that must have been some years ago. Still, she has fine things left. By all means make her sit for you." But I broke down; his face was too horribly reproachful.

He took off his hat and stood passing his handkerchief mechanically over his forehead. "'Fine things left'?" he stared. "Do you speak as if other people had helped themselves —?"

"Why my dear man," I smiled, "the years have helped themselves! But she has what the French call — don't they? — *de beaux restes?*"

Oh how he gaped and how something seemed to roll over him! "I must make my Madonna out of *de beaux restes!* What a masterpiece she'll be! Old — old! Old — old!" he re-echoed.

"Never mind her age," I cried, revolted by what I had done; "never mind my impression of her! You have your memory, your notes, your genius. Finish your picture in a month. I pronounce it beforehand a masterpiece and hereby offer you for it any sum you may choose to ask."

He kept staring, but seemed scarce to understand me. "Old — old!" he kept stupidly repeating. "If she's old what am I? If her beauty has faded where, where is my strength? Has life been a dream? Have I worshipped too long? Have I loved too well?" The charm in truth was broken. That the chord of illusion should have snapped at my light accidental touch showed how it had been weakened by excessive tension. The poor fellow's sense of wasted time, of vanished opportunity, surged in upon his soul in

waves of darkness. He suddenly dropped his head and burst into tears.

I led him homeward with all possible tenderness, but I attempted neither to check his grief, to restore his equanimity nor to unsay the hard truth. When we reached my hotel I tried to induce him to come in. "We'll drink a glass of wine," I smiled, "to the completion of the Madonna."

With a violent effort he held up his head, mused for a moment with a formidably sombre frown and then, giving me his hand, "I'll finish it," he vowed, "in a month! No, no, in a fortnight! After all I have it *here!*" And he smote his forehead. "Of course she's old! She can afford to have it said of her — a woman who has made twenty years pass like a twelvemonth! Old — old! Why, sir, she shall be eternal!"

I wished to see him safely to his own door, but he waved me back and walked away with an air of resolution, whistling and swinging his cane. I waited a moment — then followed him at a distance and saw him proceed to cross the Santa Trinità Bridge. When he reached the middle he suddenly paused, as if his strength had deserted him, and leaned upon the parapet gazing over into the Arno. I was careful to keep him in sight; I confess I passed ten very nervous minutes. He recovered himself at last and went his way slowly and with hanging head.

That I had really startled him into a bolder use of his long-garnered stores of knowledge and taste, into the vulgar effort and hazard of production, seemed at first reason enough for his continued silence and absence; but as day followed day without his either

calling or sending me a line and without my meeting him in his customary haunts, in the galleries, in the chapel at San Lorenzo, or even strolling between the Arno-side and the great hedge-screen of verdure which, along the drive of the Cascine, throws the fair occupants of the open carriages into such becoming relief — as for more than a week I got neither tidings nor sight of him, I began to fear I might have fatally offended him and that instead of giving a wholesome push to his talent, or at least to his faith, I had done it a real harm. I had a wretched suspicion I might have made him ill. My stay at Florence was drawing to a close, and it was important that before resuming my journey I should assure myself of the truth. Theobald had to the last kept his lodging a secret, and I was at a loss how to follow him up. The simplest course was to make enquiry of the object of his homage who neighboured with the Mercato Vecchio, and I confess that unsatisfied curiosity as to the lady herself counselled it as well. Perhaps I had done her injustice, perhaps she was as immortally fresh and fair as he conceived her. I was at any rate anxious to set eyes once more on the ripe enchantress who had made twenty years, as he had said, pass like a twelvemonth. I repaired accordingly one morning to her abode, climbed the interminable staircase and reached her door. It stood ajar, and, while I hesitated to enter, a little serving-maid came clattering out with an empty cooking-pot, as if she had just performed some savoury errand. The inner door too was open; so I crossed the little vestibule and reached the room in which I had formerly been received. It had n't its

evening aspect. The table, or one end of it, was spread for a late breakfast, before which sat a gentleman — an individual at least of the male sex — doing execution upon a beefsteak and onions and a bottle of wine. At his elbow, in intimate nearness, was placed the lady of the house. Her attitude, as I arrived, was not that of an enchantress. With one hand she held in her lap a plate of smoking maccaroni; with the other she had lifted high in air one of the pendulous filaments of this succulent compound and was in the act of slipping it gently down her throat. On the uncovered end of the table, facing her companion, were ranged half a dozen small statuettes, of some snuff-coloured substance resembling terra-cotta. He, brandishing his knife with ardour, was apparently descanting on their merits.

Evidently I darkened the door. My hostess dropped her maccaroni — into her mouth, and rose hastily with a harsh exclamation and a flushed face. I forthwith felt sure that the sublime Serafina's secret was still better worth knowing than I had supposed, and that the way to learn it was to take it for granted. I summoned my best Italian, I smiled and bowed and apologised for my intrusion; and in a moment, whether or no I had dispelled the lady's irritation, I had at least made her prudent. I must put myself at my ease; I must take a seat. This was another friend of hers — also an artist, she declared with a smile that had turned to the gracious. Her companion wiped his moustache and bowed with great civility. I saw at a glance that he was equal to the situation. He was presumably the author of the statuettes on the

table and knew a money-spending *forestiero* when he saw one. He was a small active man, with a clever impudent tossed-up nose, a sharp little black eye, conscious of many things at once, and the cocked-up moustache of a trooper. On the side of his head he wore jauntily one of the loose velvet caps affected by sculptors in damp studios, and I observed that his feet were encased in bright "worked" slippers. On Serafina's remarking with dignity that I was the friend of Mr. Theobald he broke out into that fantastic French of which Italians are sometimes so insistently lavish, declaring without reserve that Mr. Theobald was a magnificent genius.

"I am sure I don't know," I answered with a shrug. "If you're in a position to affirm it you've the advantage of me. I've seen nothing from his hand but the bambino yonder, which certainly is fine."

He had it that the bambino was a masterpiece—in the maniera Correggiesca. It was only a pity, he added with a knowing laugh, that the sketch had n't been made on some good bit of honeycombed old panel. The sublime Serafina hereupon protested that Mr. Theobald was the soul of honour and did n't lend himself to that style of manufacture. "I'm not a judge of genius," she said, "and I know nothing of pictures. I'm a poor simple widow; but I'm sure *nostro signore* has the heart of an angel and the virtue of a saint. He's my great benefactor," she made no secret of it. The after-glow of the somewhat sinister flush with which she had greeted me still lingered in her cheek and perhaps did n't favour her beauty; I could n't but judge it a wise custom of Theo-

bald's to visit her only by candle-light. She was coarse and her poor adorer a poet.

"I 've the greatest esteem for him," I stated; "it's for that reason I've been so uneasy at not seeing him for ten days. Have you seen him? Is he perhaps ill?"

"Ill? Heaven forbid!" cried Serafina with genuine vehemence.

Her companion uttered a rapid expletive and reproached her with not having been to see him. She hesitated a moment, then simpered the least bit and bridled. "He comes to see me — without reproach! But it would n't be the same for me to go to him, though indeed you may almost call him a man of holy life."

"He has the greatest admiration for you," I said. "He 'd have been honoured by your visit."

She looked at me a moment sharply. "More admiration than you. Admit that!" Of course I protested with all the eloquence at my command, and my ambiguous hostess then confessed that she had taken no fancy to me on my former visit and that, our friend not having returned, she believed I had poisoned his mind against her. "It would be no kindness to the poor gentleman, I can tell you that," she said. "He has come to see me every evening for years. It's a long friendship! No one knows him as I do."

"I don't pretend to know him or to understand him. I can only esteem and — I think I may say — love him. Nevertheless he seems to me a little —!" And I touched my forehead and waved my hand in the air.

Serafina glanced at her companion as for inspira-

tion. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders while he filled his glass again. The padrona hereupon treated me to a look of more meaning than quite consorted with her noble blankness. "Ah but it's for that that *I* love him! The world has so little kindness for such persons. It laughs at them and despises them and cheats them. He's too good for this wicked life. It's his blest imagination that he finds a little Paradise up here in my poor apartment. If he thinks so how can I help it? He has a strange belief — really I ought to be ashamed to tell you — that I resemble the Madonna Santissima, heaven forgive me! I let him think what he pleases so long as it makes him happy. He was very kind to me once and I'm not one who forgets a favour. So I receive him every evening civilly, and ask after his health, and let him look at me on this side and that. For that matter, I may say it without vanity, I was worth looking at once. And he's not always amusing, poveretto! He sits sometimes for an hour without speaking a word, or else he talks away, without stopping, about art and nature and beauty and duty, about fifty fine things that are all so much Latin to me. I beg you to understand that he has never said a word to me I might n't honourably listen to. He may be a little cracked, but he's one of the blessed saints."

"Eh, eh," cried the man, "the blessed saints were all a little cracked!"

Serafina, I surmised, left part of her story untold; what she said sufficed to make poor Theobald's own statement still more affecting than I had already found its strained simplicity. "It's a strange fortune,

certainly," she went on, "to have such a friend as this dear man — a friend who 's less than a lover, yet more than a brother." I glanced at her comrade, who continued to smirk in a mystifying manner while he twisted the ends of his moustache between his copious mouthfuls. Was *he* less than a lover? "But what will you have?" Serafina pursued. "In this hard world one must n't ask too many questions; one must take what comes and keep what one gets. I've kept my *amoroso* for twenty years, and I do hope that, at this time of day, signore, you 've not come to turn him against me!"

I assured her I had no such intention, and that I should vastly regret disturbing Mr. Theobald's habits or convictions. On the contrary I was alarmed about him and would at once go in search of him. She gave me his address and a florid account of her sufferings at his non-appearance. She had not been to him for various reasons; chiefly because she was afraid of displeasing him, as he had always made such a mystery of his home. "You might have sent this gentleman!" I however ventured to suggest.

"Ah," cried the gentleman, "he admires Madonna Serafina, but he would n't admire me whom he does n't take for Saint Joseph!" And then confidentially, his finger on his nose: "His taste 's terribly severe!"

I was about to withdraw after having promised that I would inform our hostess of my friend's condition, when her companion, who had risen from table and girded his loins apparently for the onset, grasped me gently by the arm and led me before the row of statu-

ettes. "I perceive by your conversation, signore, that you're a patron of the arts. Allow me to request your honourable attention for these modest products of my own ingenuity. They are brand-new, fresh from my atelier, and have never been exhibited in public. I have brought them here to receive the verdict of this dear lady, who's a good critic, for all she may pretend to the contrary. I 'm the inventor of this peculiar style of statuette — of subject, manner, material, everything. Touch them, I pray you; handle them freely — you need n't fear. Delicate as they look, it's impossible they should break! My various creations have met with great success. They're especially admired by the American *conoscenti*. I've sent them all over Europe — to London, Paris, Vienna! You may have noticed some little specimens in Paris, on the *grand boulevard*" — he aimed at the French sound of the words — "in a shop of which they constitute the specialty. There's always a crowd about the window. They form a very pleasing ornament for the mantel-shelf of a gay young bachelor, for the boudoir of a pretty woman. You could n't make a prettier present to a person with whom you should wish to exchange a harmless joke. It's not classic art, signore, of course; but, between ourselves, is n't classic art sometimes rather a bore? Caricature, burlesque, *la charge*, has hitherto been confined to paper, to the pen and pencil. Now it has been my inspiration to introduce it into statuary. For this purpose I've invented a peculiar plastic compound which you will permit me not to divulge. That's my secret, signore! It's as light, you perceive, as cork, and yet

as firm as alabaster! I frankly confess that I really pride myself as much on this little stroke of chemical ingenuity as upon the other element of novelty in my creations — my types. What do you say to my types, signore? The idea's bold; does it strike you as happy? Cats and monkeys — monkeys and cats — all human life is there! Human life, of course I mean, viewed with the eye of the satirist! To combine sculpture and satire, signore, has been my unprecedented ambition. I flatter myself I've not egregiously failed."

As this jaunty Juvenal of the chimney-piece thus persuasively proceeded he took up his little groups successively from the table, held them aloft, turned them about, rapped them with his knuckles and gazed at them lovingly, his head on one side. They consisted each, with a vengeance, of a cat and a monkey, occasionally draped, in some preposterously sentimental conjunction. They exhibited a certain sameness of motive and illustrated chiefly the different phases of what, in fine terms, might have been called the amorous advance and the amorous alarm; but they were strikingly clever and expressive, and were at once very dreadful little beasts and very natural men and women. I confess, however, that they failed to amuse me. I was doubtless not in a mood to enjoy them, for they seemed to me peculiarly cynical and vulgar. Their imitative felicity was revolting. As I looked askance at the complacent little artist, brandishing them between finger and thumb and caressing them with the fondest eye, he struck me as himself little more than an exceptionally intelligent ape. I mustered an admiring grin, however, and he blew

another blast. "My figures are studied from life! I've a little menagerie of monkeys whose frolics I follow by the hour. As for the cats, one has only to look out of one's back window! Since I've begun to examine these expressive little brutes I've made many profound observations. Speaking, signore, to a man of imagination, I may say that my little designs are not without a philosophy of their own. Truly, I don't know whether the cats and monkeys imitate us, or whether it's we who imitate them." I congratulated him on his philosophy, and he resumed: "You'll do me the honour to admit that I've handled my subjects with delicacy. Eh, it was needed, *signore mio.* I've been just a bit free, but not too free — eh, *dica?* Just a scrap of a hint, you know! You may see as much or as little as you please. These little groups, however, are no measure of my invention. If you'll favour me with a call at my studio I think you'll admit that my combinations are really infinite. I likewise execute figures to command. You've perhaps some little motive — the fruit of your philosophy of life, signore — which you'd like to have interpreted. I can promise to work it up to your satisfaction; it shall have as many high lights and sharp accents as you please! Allow me to present you with my card and to remind you that my prices are moderate. Only sixty francs for a little group like that. My statuettes are as durable as bronze — *aere perennius*, signore — and, between ourselves, I think they're more amusing!"

As I pocketed his card I turned an eye on Madonna Serafina, wondering whether she had a sense for con-

trasts. She had picked up one of the little couples and was tenderly dusting it with a feather broom.

What I had just seen and heard had so deepened my compassionate interest in my deluded friend that I took a summary leave, making my way directly to the house designated by this remarkable woman. It was in an obscure corner of the opposite side of the town and presented a sombre and squalid appearance. A withered crone, in the doorway, on my enquiring for Theobald, welcomed me with a mumbled blessing and an expression of relief at the poor gentleman's having at last a caller. His lodging appeared to consist of a single room at the top of the house. On getting no answer to my knock I opened the door, supposing him absent; so that it gave me a certain shock to find him but seated helpless and dumb. His chair was near the single window, facing an easel which supported a large canvas. On my entering he looked up at me blankly, without changing his position, which was that of absolute lassitude and dejection, his arms loosely folded, his legs stretched before him, his head hanging on his breast. Advancing into the room I saw how vividly his face answered to his attitude. He was pale, haggard and unshaven, and his dull and sunken eye gazed at me without a spark of recognition. My fear had been that he would greet me with fierce reproaches, as the cruelly officious patron who had turned his contentment to bitterness, and I was relieved to find my appearance excite no visible resentment. "Don't you know me?" — I put out my hand. "Have you already forgotten me?"

He made no response, but kept his position stupidly

and left me staring about the room. It spoke, the poor place, all plaintively for itself. Shabby, sordid, naked, it contained, beyond the wretched bed, but the scantiest provision for personal comfort. It was bedroom at once and studio — a grim ghost of a studio. A few dusty casts and prints on the walls, three or four old canvases turned face inward and a rusty-looking colour-box formed, with the easel at the window, the sum of its appurtenances. The whole scene savoured horribly of indigence. Its only wealth was the picture on the easel, presumably the famous Madonna. Averted as this was from the door I was unable to see its face; but at last, sickened by my impression of vacant misery, I passed behind Theobald eagerly and tenderly. I can scarcely say I was surprised at what I found — a canvas that was a mere dead blank cracked and discoloured by time. This was his immortal work! Though not surprised I confess I was powerfully moved, and I think that for five minutes I could n't have trusted myself to speak. At last my silent nearness affected him; he stirred and turned and then rose, looking at me with a slow return of intelligence. I murmured some kind ineffective nothings about his being ill and needing advice and care, but he seemed absorbed in the effort to recall distinctly what had last passed between us. "You were right," he said with a pitiful smile, "I'm a dawdler! I'm a failure! I shall do nothing more in this world. You opened my eyes, and though the truth is bitter I bear you no grudge. Amen! I've been sitting here for a week face to face with it, the terrible truth, face to face with the past, with my weakness

and poverty and nullity. I shall never touch a brush! I believe I 've neither eaten nor slept. Look at that canvas!" he went on as I relieved my emotion by an urgent request that he would come home with me and dine. "That was to have contained my masterpiece! Is n't it a promising foundation? The elements of it are all *here*." And he tapped his forehead with that mystic confidence which had so often marked the gesture for me before. "If I could only transpose them into some brain that has the hand, the will! Since I 've been sitting here taking stock of my intellects I 've come to believe that I 've the material for a hundred masterpieces. But my hand's paralysed now and they 'll never be painted. I never began! I waited and waited to be worthier to begin — I wasted my life in preparation. While I fancied my creation was growing it was only dying. I 've taken the whole business too hard. Michael Angelo did n't when he went at the Lorenzo. He did his best at a venture, and his venture 's immortal. *That's* mine!" And he pointed with a gesture I shall never forget at the empty canvas. "I suppose we 're a genus by ourselves in the providential scheme — we talents that can't act, that can't do nor dare! We take it out in talk, in study, in plans and promises, in visions! But our visions, let me tell you," he cried with a toss of his head, "have a way of being brilliant, and a man has not lived in vain who has seen the things *I've* seen! Of course you won't believe in them when that bit of worm-eaten cloth is all I have to show for them; but to convince you, to enchant and astound the world, I need only the hand of Raphael. His brain I already have. A

pity, you'll say, that I have n't his modesty! Ah let me boast and babble now — it's all I have left! I'm the half of a genius! Where in the wide world is my other half? Lodged perhaps in the vulgar soul, the cunning ready fingers of some dull copyist or some trivial artisan who turns out by the dozen his easy prodigies of touch! But it's not for me to sneer at him; he at least does something. He's not a dawdler. Well for me if I had been vulgar and clever and reckless, if I could have shut my eyes and taken my leap."

What to say to the poor fellow, what to do for him, seemed hard to determine; I chiefly felt I must break the spell of his present inaction and draw him out of the haunted air of the little room it was such cruel irony to call a studio. I can't say I persuaded him to come forth with me; he simply suffered himself to be led, and when we began to walk in the warm light of day I was able to appreciate his great weakness. Nevertheless he seemed in a manner to revive; he even murmured to me at last that he should like to go to the Pitti Gallery. I shall never forget our melancholy stroll through those gorgeous halls, every picture on whose walls glowed, to my stricken sight, with an insolent renewal of strength and lustre. The eyes and lips of the great portraits reflected for me a pitying scorn of the dejected pretender who had dreamed of competing with their triumphant authors. The celestial candour even of the Madonna of the Chair, as we paused in perfect silence before her, broke into the strange smile of the women of Leonardo. Perfect silence indeed marked our whole progress — the silence of a deep farewell; for I felt in all

my pulses, as Theobald, leaning on my arm, dragged one heavy foot after the other, that he was looking his last. When we came out he was so exhausted that instead of taking him to my hotel to dine I called a cab and drove him straight to his own poor lodging. He had sunk into the deepest lethargy; he lay back in the vehicle with his eyes closed, as pale as death, his faint breathing interrupted at intervals by a gasp like a smothered sob or a vain attempt to speak. With the help of the old woman who had admitted me before and who emerged from a dark back court I contrived to lead him up the long steep staircase and lay him on his wretched bed. To her I gave him in charge while I prepared in all haste to call in a doctor. But she followed me out of the room with a pitiful clasping of her hands.

"Poor dear blessed gentleman," she wailed — "is he dying?"

"Possibly. How long has he been so bad?"

"Since a certain night he passed ten days ago. I came up in the morning to make his poor bed, and found him sitting up in his clothes before that great dirty canvas he keeps there. Poor dear strange man, he says his prayers to it! He had n't been to bed — nor even since then, as you may say. What has happened to him? Has he found out about *quella cattiva donna?*" she panted with a glittering eye and a toothless grin.

"Prove at least that one old woman can be faithful," I said, "and watch him well till I come back." My return was delayed through the absence of the English physician, who was away on a round of

visits and whom I vainly pursued from house to house before I overtook him. I brought him to Theobald's bedside none too soon. A violent fever had seized our patient, whose case was evidently grave. A couple of hours later on I knew he had brain-fever. From this moment I was with him constantly, but I am far from wishing fully to report his illness. Excessively painful to witness, it was happily brief. Life burned out in delirium. One night in particular that I passed at his pillow, listening to his wild snatches of regret, of aspiration, of rapture and awe at the phantasmal pictures with which his brain seemed to swarm, comes back to my memory now like some stray page from a lost masterpiece of tragedy. Before a week was over we had buried him in the little Protestant cemetery on the way to Fiesole. Madonna Serafina, whom I had caused to be informed of his state, had come in person, I was told, to enquire about its progress; but she was absent from his funeral, which was attended but by a scanty concourse of mourners. Half a dozen old Florentine sojourners, in spite of the prolonged estrangement that had preceded his death, had felt the kindly impulse to honour his grave. Among them was my friend Mrs. Coventry, whom I found, on my departure, waiting in her carriage at the gate of the cemetery.

"Well," she said, relieving at last with a significant smile the solemnity of our immediate greeting, "and the greatest of all Madonnas? Have you seen her after all?"

"I've seen her," I said; "she's mine — by bequest. But I shall never show her to you."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because you would n't understand her!"

She rather glared at me. "Upon my word you're polite!"

"Pardon me — I'm sad and vexed and bitter." And with reprehensible rudeness I marched away. I was impatient to leave Florence; my friend's blighted spirit met my eyes in all aspects. I had packed my trunk to start for Rome that night, and meanwhile, to beguile my unrest, I aimlessly paced the streets. Chance led me at last to the church of San Lorenzo. Remembering poor Theobald's phrase about Michael Angelo — "He did his best at a venture" — I went in and turned my steps to the chapel of the tombs. Viewing in sadness the sadness of its immortal treasures, I could say to myself while I stood there that they needed no ampler commentary than those simple words. As I passed through the church again to leave it, a woman, turning away from one of the side-altars, met me face to face. The black shawl depending from her head draped becomingly the handsome face of Madonna Serafina. She stopped as she recognised me, and I saw she wished to speak. Her brow was lighted and her ample bosom heaved in a way that seemed to portend a certain sharpness of reproach. But some expression of my own then drew the sting from her resentment, and she addressed me in a tone in which bitterness was tempered by an acceptance of the anticlimax that had been after all so long and so wondrously postponed. "I know it was you, now, who separated us," she said. "It was a pity he ever brought you to see me! Of

course, you could n't think of me as he did. Well, the Lord gave him, the Lord has taken him. I've just paid for a nine days' mass for his soul. And I can tell you this, signore — I never deceived him. Who put it into his head that I was made to live on holy thoughts and fine phrases? It was his own imagination, and it pleased him to think so. Did he suffer much?" she added more softly and after a pause.

"His sufferings were great, but they were short."

"And did he speak of me?" She had hesitated and dropped her eyes; she raised them with her question, and revealed in their sombre stillness a gleam of feminine confidence which for the moment revived and enhanced her beauty. Poor Theobald! Whatever name he had given his passion it was still her fine eyes that had charmed him.

"Be contented, madam," I answered gravely.

She lowered her lids again and was silent. Then exhaling a full rich sigh as she gathered her shawl together: "He was a magnificent genius!"

I bowed assent and we separated.

Passing through a narrow side-street on my way back to my hotel, I noted above a doorway a sign that it seemed to me I had read before. I suddenly remembered it for identical with the superscription of a card that I had carried for an hour in my waistcoat-pocket. On the threshold stood the ingenious artist whose claims to public favour were thus distinctly signalised, smoking a pipe in the evening air and giving the finishing polish with a bit of rag to one of his inimitable "combinations." I caught the expressive curl of a couple of tails. He recognised me, removed

his little red cap with an obsequious bow and motioned me to enter his studio. I returned his salute and passed on, vexed with the apparition. For a week afterwards, whenever I was seized among the ruins of triumphant Rome with some peculiarly poignant memory of Theobald's transcendent illusions and deplorable failure, I seemed to catch the other so impertinent and so cynical echo: "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats — all human life is there!"

LOUISA PALLANT

LOUISA PALLANT

I

NEVER say you know the last word about any human heart! I was once treated to a revelation which startled and touched me in the nature of a person with whom I had been acquainted — well, as I supposed — for years, whose character I had had good reasons, heaven knows, to appreciate and in regard to whom I flattered myself I had nothing more to learn.

It was on the terrace of the Kursaal at Homburg, nearly ten years ago, one beautiful night toward the end of July. I had come to the place that day from Frankfort, with vague intentions, and was mainly occupied in waiting for my young nephew, the only son of my sister, who had been entrusted to my care by a very fond mother for the summer — I was expected to show him Europe, only the very best of it — and was on his way from Paris to join me. The excellent band discoursed music not too abstruse, while the air was filled besides with the murmur of different languages, the smoke of many cigars, the creak on the gravel of the gardens of strolling shoes and the thick tinkle of beer-glasses. There were a hundred people walking about, there were some in clusters at little tables and many on benches and rows of chairs, watching the others as if they had paid for the privilege and were rather disappointed. I was among these last;

I sat by myself, smoking my cigar and thinking of nothing very particular while families and couples passed and repassed me.

I scarce know how long I had sat when I became aware of a recognition which made my meditations definite. It was on my own part, and the object of it was a lady who moved to and fro, unconscious of my observation, with a young girl at her side. I had n't seen her for ten years, and what first struck me was the fact not that she was Mrs. Henry Pallant, but that the girl who was with her was remarkably pretty — or rather first of all that every one who passed appeared extremely to admire. This led me also to notice the young lady myself, and her charming face diverted my attention for some time from that of her companion. The latter, moreover, though it was night, wore a thin light veil which made her features vague. The couple slowly walked and walked, but though they were very quiet and decorous, and also very well dressed, they seemed to have no friends. Every one observed but no one addressed them; they appeared even themselves to exchange very few words. Moreover they bore with marked composure and as if they were thoroughly used to it the attention they excited. I am afraid it occurred to me to take for granted that they were of an artful intention and that if they had n't been the elder lady would have handed the younger over a little less to public valuation and not have sought so to conceal her own face. Perhaps this question came into my mind too easily just then — in view of my prospective mentorship to my nephew. If I was to show him only the best of Europe I should

have to be very careful about the people he should meet — especially the ladies — and the relations he should form. I suspected him of great innocence and was uneasy about my office. Was I completely relieved and reassured when I became aware that I simply had Louisa Pallant before me and that the girl was her daughter Linda, whom I had known as a child — Linda grown up to charming beauty?

The question was delicate and the proof that I was not very sure is perhaps that I forbore to speak to my pair at once. I watched them a while — I wondered what they would do. No great harm assuredly; but I was anxious to see if they were really isolated. Homburg was then a great resort of the English — the London season took up its tale there toward the first of August — and I had an idea that in such a company as that Louisa would naturally know people. It was my impression that she "cultivated" the English, that she had been much in London and would be likely to have views in regard to a permanent settlement there. This supposition was quickened by the sight of Linda's beauty, for I knew there is no country in which such attractions are more appreciated. You will see what time I took, and I confess that as I finished my cigar I thought it all over. There was no good reason in fact why I should have rushed into Mrs. Pallant's arms. She had not treated me well and we had never really made it up. Somehow even the circumstance that — after the first soreness — I was glad to have lost her had never put us quite right with each other; nor, for herself, had it made her less ashamed of her heartless behaviour that poor Pallant

proved finally no great catch. I had forgiven her; I had n't felt it anything but an escape not to have married a girl who had in her to take back her given word and break a fellow's heart for mere flesh-pots — or the shallow promise, as it pitifully turned out, of flesh-pots. Moreover we had met since then — on the occasion of my former visit to Europe; had looked each other in the eyes, had pretended to be easy friends and had talked of the wickedness of the world as composedly as if we were the only just, the only pure. I knew by that time what she had given out — that I had driven her off by my insane jealousy before she ever thought of Henry Pallant, before she had ever seen him. This had n't been before and could n't be to-day a ground of real reunion, especially if you add to it that she knew perfectly what I thought of her. It seldom ministers to friendship, I believe, that your friend shall know your real opinion, for he knows it mainly when it's unfavourable, and this is especially the case if — let the solecism pass! — he be a woman. I had n't followed Mrs. Pallant's fortunes; the years went by for me in my own country, whereas she led her life, which I vaguely believed to be difficult after her husband's death — virtually that of a bankrupt — in foreign lands. I heard of her from time to time; always as "established" somewhere, but on each occasion in a different place. She drifted from country to country, and if she had been of a hard composition at the beginning it could never occur to me that her struggle with society, as it might be called, would have softened the paste. Whenever I heard a woman spoken of as "horribly worldly" I thought immedi-

ately of the object of my early passion. I imagined she had debts, and when I now at last made up my mind to recall myself to her it was present to me that she might ask me to lend her money. More than anything else, however, at this time of day, I was sorry for her, so that such an idea did n't operate as a deterrent.

She pretended afterwards that she had n't noticed me — expressing as we stood face to face great surprise and wishing to know where I had dropped from; but I think the corner of her eye had taken me in and she had been waiting to see what I would do. She had ended by sitting down with her girl on the same row of chairs with myself, and after a little, the seat next to her becoming vacant, I had gone and stood before her. She had then looked up at me a moment, staring as if she could n't imagine who I was or what I wanted; after which, smiling and extending her hands, she had broken out: "Ah my dear old friend — what a delight!" If she had waited to see what I would do in order to choose her own line she thus at least carried out this line with the utmost grace. She was cordial, friendly, artless, interested, and indeed I 'm sure she was very glad to see me. I may as well say immediately, none the less, that she gave me neither then nor later any sign of a desire to contract a loan. She had scant means — that I learned — yet seemed for the moment able to pay her way. I took the empty chair and we remained in talk for an hour. After a while she made me sit at her other side, next her daughter, whom she wished to know me — to love me — as one of their oldest friends. "It goes back,

back, back, does n't it?" said Mrs. Pallant; "and of course she remembers you as a child." Linda smiled all sweetly and blankly, and I saw she remembered me not a whit. When her mother threw out that they had often talked about me she failed to take it up, though she looked extremely nice. Looking nice was her strong point; she was prettier even than her mother had been. She was such a little lady that she made me ashamed of having doubted, however vaguely and for a moment, of her position in the scale of propriety. Her appearance seemed to say that if she had no acquaintances it was because she did n't want them — because nobody there struck her as attractive: there was n't the slightest difficulty about her choosing her friends. Linda Pallant, young as she was, and fresh and fair and charming, gentle and sufficiently shy, looked somehow exclusive — as if the dust of the common world had never been meant to besprinkle her. She was of thinner consistency than her mother and clearly not a young woman of professions — except in so far as she was committed to an interest in you by her bright pure candid smile. No girl who had such a lovely way of parting her lips could pass for designing.

As I sat between the pair I felt I had been taken possession of and that for better or worse my stay at Homburg would be intimately associated with theirs. We gave each other a great deal of news and expressed unlimited interest in each other's history since our last meeting. I might n't judge of what Mrs. Pallant kept back, but for myself I quite overflowed. She let me see at any rate that her life had been a good deal

what I supposed, though the terms she employed to describe it were less crude than those of my thought. She confessed they had drifted, she and her daughter, and were drifting still. Her narrative rambled and took a wrong turn, a false flight, or two, as I thought Linda noted, while she sat watching the passers, in a manner that betrayed no consciousness of their attention, without coming to her mother's aid. Once or twice Mrs. Pallant made me rather feel a cross-questioner, which I had had no intention of being. I took it that if the girl never put in a word it was because she had perfect confidence in her parent's ability to come out straight. It was suggested to me, I scarcely knew how, that this confidence between the two ladies went to a great length; that their union of thought, their system of reciprocal divination, was remarkable, and that they probably seldom needed to resort to the clumsy and in some cases dangerous expedient of communicating by sound. I suppose I made this reflexion not all at once — it was not wholly the result of that first meeting. I was with them constantly for the next several days and my impressions had time to clarify.

I do remember, however, that it was on this first evening that Archie's name came up. She attributed her own stay at Homburg to no refined nor exalted motive — did n't put it that she was there from force of habit or because a high medical authority had ordered her to drink the waters; she frankly admitted the reason of her visit to have been simply that she did n't know where else to turn. But she appeared to assume that my behaviour rested on higher grounds

and even that it required explanation, the place being frivolous and modern — devoid of that interest of antiquity which I had ever made so much of. "Don't you remember — ever so long ago — that you would n't look at anything in Europe that was n't a thousand years old? Well, as we advance in life I suppose we don't think that quite such a charm." And when I mentioned that I had arrived because the place was as good as another for awaiting my nephew she exclaimed: "Your nephew — what nephew? He must have come up of late." I answered that his name was Archie Parker and that he was modern indeed; he was to attain legal manhood in a few months and was in Europe for the first time. My last news of him had been from Paris and I was expecting to hear further from one day to the other. His father was dead, and though a selfish bachelor, little versed in the care of children, I was considerably counted on by his mother to see that he did n't smoke nor flirt too much, nor yet tumble off an Alp.

Mrs. Pallant immediately guessed that his mother was my sister Charlotte, whom she spoke of familiarly, though I knew she had scarce seen her. Then in a moment it came to her which of the Parkers Charlotte had married; she remembered the family perfectly from the old New York days — "that disgustingly rich set." She said it was very nice having the boy come out that way to my care; to which I replied that it was very nice for the boy. She pronounced the advantage rather mine — I ought to have had children; there was something so parental about me and I would have brought them up so well. She could

make an allusion like that — to all that might have been and had not been — without a gleam of guilt in her eye; and I foresaw that before I left the place I should have confided to her that though I detested her and was very glad we had fallen out, yet our old relations had left me no heart for marrying another woman. If I had remained so single and so sterile the fault was nobody's but hers. She asked what I meant to do with my nephew — to which I replied that it was much more a question of what he would do with me. She wished to know if he were a nice young man and had brothers and sisters and any particular profession. I assured her I had really seen little of him; I believed him to be six feet high and of tolerable parts. He was an only son, but there was a little sister at home, a delicate, rather blighted child, demanding all the mother's care.

"So that makes your responsibility greater, as it were, about the boy, does n't it?" said Mrs. Pallant.

"Greater? I'm sure I don't know."

"Why if the girl's life's uncertain he may become, some moment, all the mother has. So that being in your hands —"

"Oh I shall keep him alive, I suppose, if you mean that," I returned.

"Well, *we* won't kill him, shall we, Linda?" my friend went on with a laugh.

"I don't know — perhaps we shall!" smiled the girl.

II

I CALLED on them the next day at their lodgings, the modesty of which was enhanced by a hundred pretty feminine devices — flowers and photographs and portable knick-knacks and a hired piano and morsels of old brocade flung over angular sofas. I took them to drive; I met them again at the Kursaal; I arranged that we should dine together, after the Homburg fashion, at the same *table d'hôte;* and during several days this revived familiar intercourse continued, imitating intimacy if not quite achieving it. I was pleased, as my companions passed the time for me and the conditions of our life were soothing — the feeling of summer and shade and music and leisure in the German gardens and woods, where we strolled and sat and gossiped; to which may be added a vague sociable sense that among people whose challenge to the curiosity was mainly not irresistible we kept quite to ourselves. We were on the footing of old friends who still had in regard to each other discoveries to make. We knew each other's nature but didn't know each other's experience; so that when Mrs. Pallant related to me what she had been "up to," as I called it, for so many years, the former knowledge attached a hundred interpretative footnotes — as if I had been editing an author who presented difficulties — to the interesting page. There was nothing new to me in the fact that I did n't esteem her, but there was relief

in my finding that this was n't necessary at Homburg and that I could like her in spite of it. She struck me, in the oddest way, as both improved and degenerate; the two processes, in her nature, might have gone on together. She was battered and world-worn and, spiritually speaking, vulgarised; something fresh had rubbed off her — it even included the vivacity of her early desire to do the best thing for herself — and something rather stale had rubbed on. At the same time she betrayed a scepticism, and that was rather becoming, for it had quenched the eagerness of her prime, the mercenary principle I had so suffered from. She had grown weary and detached, and since she affected me as more impressed with the evil of the world than with the good, this was a gain; in other words her accretion of indifference, if not of cynicism, showed a softer surface than that of her old ambitions. Furthermore I had to recognise that her devotion to her daughter was a kind of religion; she had done the very best possible for Linda.

Linda was curious, Linda was interesting; I 've seen girls I liked better — charming as this one might be — but have never seen one who for the hour you were with her (the impression passed somehow when she was out of sight) occupied you so completely. I can best describe the attention she provoked by saying that she struck you above all things as a felicitous *final* product — after the fashion of some plant or some fruit, some waxen orchid or some perfect peach. She was clearly the result of a process of calculation, a process patiently educative, a pressure exerted, and all artfully, so that she should reach a high point.

This high point had been the star of her mother's heaven — it hung before her so unquenchably — and had shed the only light (in default of a better) that was to shine on the poor lady's path. It stood her instead of every other ideal. The very most and the very best — that was what the girl had been led on to achieve; I mean of course, since no real miracle had been wrought, the most and the best she was capable of. She was as pretty, as graceful, as intelligent, as well-bred, as well-informed, as well-dressed, as could have been conceived for her; her music, her singing, her German, her French, her English, her step, her tone, her glance, her manner, everything in her person and movement, from the shade and twist of her hair to the way you saw her finger-nails were pink when she raised her hand, had been carried so far that one found one's self accepting them as the very measure of young grace. I regarded her thus as a model, yet it was a part of her perfection that she had none of the stiffness of a pattern. If she held the observation it was because you wondered where and when she would break down; but she never broke down, either in her French accent or in her rôle of educated angel.

After Archie had come the ladies were manifestly his greatest resource, and all the world knows why a party of four is more convenient than a party of three. My nephew had kept me waiting a week, with a serenity all his own; but this very coolness was a help to harmony — so long, that is, as I did n't lose my temper with it. I did n't, for the most part, because my young man's unperturbed acceptance of the most various forms of good fortune had more than anything

else the effect of amusing me. I had seen little of him for the last three or four years; I wondered what his impending majority would have made of him — he did n't at all carry himself as if the wind of his fortune were rising — and I watched him with a solicitude that usually ended in a joke. He was a tall fresh-coloured youth, with a candid circular countenance and a love of cigarettes, horses and boats which had not been sacrificed to more strenuous studies. He was reassuringly natural, in a supercivilised age, and I soon made up my mind that the formula of his character was in the clearing of the inward scene by his so preordained lack of imagination. If he was serene this was still further simplifying. After that I had time to meditate on the line that divides the serene from the inane, the simple from the silly. He was n't clever; the fonder theory quite defied our cultivation, though Mrs. Pallant tried it once or twice; but on the other hand it struck me his want of wit might be a good defensive weapon. It was n't the sort of density that would let him in, but the sort that would keep him out. By which I don't mean that he had shortsighted suspicions, but that on the contrary imagination would never be needed to save him, since she would never put him in danger. He was in short a well-grown well-washed muscular young American, whose extreme salubrity might have made him pass for conceited. If he looked pleased with himself it was only because he was pleased with life — as well he might be, with the fortune that awaited the stroke of his twenty-first year — and his big healthy independent person was an inevitable part of that. I am

bound to add that he was accommodating — for which I was grateful. His habits were active, but he did n't insist on my adopting them and he made numerous and generous sacrifices for my society. When I say he made them for mine I must duly remember that mine and that of Mrs. Pallant and Linda were now very much the same thing. He was willing to sit and smoke for hours under the trees or, adapting his long legs to the pace of his three companions, stroll through the nearer woods of the charming little hill-range of the Taunus to those rustic *Wirthschaften* where coffee might be drunk under a trellis.

Mrs. Pallant took a great interest in him; she made him, with his easy uncle, a subject of discourse; she pronounced him a delightful specimen, as a young gentleman of his period and country. She even asked me the sort of "figure" his fortune might really amount to, and professed a rage of envy when I told her what I supposed it to be. While we were so occupied Archie, on his side, could n't do less than converse with Linda, nor to tell the truth did he betray the least inclination for any different exercise. They strolled away together while their elders rested; two or three times, in the evening, when the ballroom of the Kursaal was lighted and dance-music played, they whirled over the smooth floor in a waltz that stirred my memory. Whether it had the same effect on Mrs. Pallant's I know not: she held her peace. We had on certain occasions our moments, almost our half-hours, of unembarrassed silence while our young companions disported themselves. But if at other times her enquiries and comments were numerous on

this article of my ingenuous charge, that might very well have passed for a courteous recognition of the frequent admiration I expressed for Linda — an admiration that drew from her, I noticed, but scant direct response. I was struck thus with her reserve when I spoke of her daughter — my remarks produced so little of a maternal flutter. Her detachment, her air of having no fatuous illusions and not being blinded by prejudice, seemed to me at times to savour of affectation. Either she answered me with a vague and impatient sigh and changed the subject, or else she said before doing so: "Oh yes, yes, she's a very brilliant creature. She ought to be: God knows what I've done for her!"

The reader will have noted my fondness, in all cases, for the explanations of things; as an example of which I had my theory here that she was disappointed in the girl. Where then had her special calculation failed? As she could n't possibly have wished her prettier or more pleasing, the pang must have been for her not having made a successful use of her gifts. Had she expected her to "land" a prince the day after leaving the schoolroom? There was after all plenty of time for this, with Linda but two-and-twenty. It did n't occur to me to wonder if the source of her mother's tepidity was that the young lady had not turned out so nice a nature as she had hoped, because in the first place Linda struck me as perfectly innocent, and because in the second I was n't paid, in the French phrase, for supposing Louisa Pallant much concerned on that score. The last hypothesis I should have invoked was that of private despair at bad moral symp-

toms. And in relation to Linda's nature I had before me the daily spectacle of her manner with my nephew. It was as charming as it could be without betrayal of a desire to lead him on. She was as familiar as a cousin, but as a distant one — a cousin who had been brought up to observe degrees. She was so much cleverer than Archie that she could n't help laughing at him, but she did n't laugh enough to exclude variety, being well aware, no doubt, that a woman's cleverness most shines in contrast with a man's stupidity when she pretends to take that stupidity for her law. Linda Pallant moreover was not a chatterbox; as she knew the value of many things she knew the value of intervals. There were a good many in the conversation of these young persons; my nephew's own speech, to say nothing of his thought, abounding in comfortable lapses; so that I sometimes wondered how their association was kept at that pitch of continuity of which it gave the impression. It was friendly enough, evidently, when Archie sat near her — near enough for low murmurs, had such risen to his lips — and watched her with interested eyes and with freedom not to try too hard to make himself agreeable. She had always something in hand — a flower in her tapestry to finish, the leaves of a magazine to cut, a button to sew on her glove (she carried a little work-bag in her pocket and was a person of the daintiest habits), a pencil to ply ever so neatly in a sketchbook which she rested on her knee. When we were indoors — mainly then at her mother's modest rooms — she had always the resource of her piano, of which she was of course a perfect mistress.

These pursuits supported her, they helped her to an assurance under such narrow inspection — I ended by rebuking Archie for it; I told him he stared the poor girl out of countenance — and she sought further relief in smiling all over the place. When my young man's eyes shone at her those of Miss Pallant addressed themselves brightly to the trees and clouds and other surrounding objects, including her mother and me. Sometimes she broke into a sudden embarrassed happy pointless laugh. When she wandered off with him she looked back at us in a manner that promised it was n't for long and that she was with us still in spirit. If I liked her I had therefore my good reason: it was many a day since a pretty girl had had the air of taking me so much into account. Sometimes when they were so far away as not to disturb us she read aloud a little to Mr. Archie. I don't know where she got her books — I never provided them, and certainly he did n't. He was no reader and I fear he often dozed.

III

I REMEMBER well the first time — it was at the end of about ten days of this — that Mrs. Pallant remarked to me: "My dear friend, you're quite amazing! You behave for all the world as if you were perfectly ready to accept certain consequences." She nodded in the direction of our young companions, but I nevertheless put her at the pains of saying what consequences she meant. "What consequences? Why the very same consequences that ensued when you and I first became acquainted."

I hesitated, but then, looking her in the eyes, said: "Do you mean she'd throw him over?"

"You're not kind, you're not generous," she replied with a quick colour. "I'm giving you a warning."

"You mean that my boy may fall in love with your girl?"

"Certainly. It looks even as if the harm might be already done."

"Then your warning comes too late," I significantly smiled. "But why do you call it a harm?"

"Have n't you any sense of the rigour of your office?" she asked. "Is that what his mother has sent him out to you for: that you shall find him the first wife you can pick up, that you shall let him put his head into the noose the day after his arrival?"

"Heaven forbid I should do anything of the kind!

I know moreover that his mother does n't want him to marry young. She holds it the worst of mistakes, she feels that at that age a man never really chooses. He does n't choose till he has lived a while, till he has looked about and compared."

"And what do you think then yourself?"

"I should like to say I regard the fact of falling in love, at whatever age, as in itself an act of selection. But my being as I am at this time of day would contradict me too much."

"Well then, you 're too primitive. You ought to leave this place to-morrow."

"So as not to see Archie fall — ?"

"You ought to fish him out now — from where he *has* fallen — and take him straight away."

I wondered a little. "Do you think he 's in very far?"

"If I were his mother I know what I should think. I can put myself in her place — I 'm not narrow-minded. I know perfectly well how she must regard such a question."

"And don't you know," I returned, "that in America that 's not thought important — the way the mother regards it?"

Mrs. Pallant had a pause — as if I mystified or vexed her. "Well, we 're not in America. We happen to be here."

"No; my poor sister 's up to her neck in New York."

"I 'm almost capable of writing to her to come out," said Mrs. Pallant.

"You *are* warning me," I cried, "but I hardly know of what! It seems to me my responsibility would

begin only at the moment your daughter herself should seem in danger."

"Oh you need n't mind that — I 'll take care of Linda."

But I went on. "If you think she 's in danger already I 'll carry him off to-morrow."

"It would be the best thing you could do."

"I don't know — I should be very sorry to act on a false alarm. I 'm very well here; I like the place and the life and your society. Besides, it does n't strike me that — on her side — there 's any real symptom."

She looked at me with an air I had never seen in her face, and if I had puzzled her she repaid me in kind. "You 're very annoying. You don't deserve what I 'd fain do for you."

What she 'd fain do for me she did n't tell me that day, but we took up the subject again. I remarked that I failed to see why we should assume that a girl like Linda — brilliant enough to make one of the greatest matches — would fall so very easily into my nephew's arms. Might I enquire if her mother had won a confession from her, if she had stammered out her secret? Mrs. Pallant made me, on this, the point that they had no need to tell each other such things — they had n't lived together twenty years in such intimacy for nothing. To which I returned that I had guessed as much, but that there might be an exception for a great occasion like the present. If Linda had shown nothing it was a sign that for *her* the occasion was n't great; and I mentioned that Archie had spoken to me of the young lady only to remark casually and rather patronisingly, after his first encounter

with her, that she was a regular little flower. (The little flower was nearly three years older than himself.) Apart from this he had n't alluded to her and had taken up no allusion of mine. Mrs. Pallant informed me again — for which I was prepared — that I was quite too primitive; after which she said: "We need n't discuss the case if you don't wish to, but I happen to know — how I obtained my knowledge is n't important — that the moment Mr. Parker should propose to my daughter she'd gobble him down. Surely it's a detail worth mentioning to you."

I sought to defer then to her judgement. "Very good. I'll sound him. I'll look into the matter tonight."

"Don't, don't; you'll spoil everything!" She spoke as with some finer view. "Remove him quickly — that's the only thing."

I did n't at all like the idea of removing him quickly; it seemed too summary, too extravagant, even if presented to him on specious grounds; and moreover, as I had told Mrs. Pallant, I really had no wish to change my scene. It was no part of my promise to my sister that, with my middle-aged habits, I should duck and dodge about Europe. So I temporised. "Should you really object to the boy so much as a son-in-law? After all he's a good fellow and a gentleman."

"My poor friend, you're incredibly superficial!" she made answer with an assurance that struck me.

The contempt in it so nettled me in fact that I exclaimed: "Possibly! But it seems odd that a lesson in consistency should come from *you*."

I had no retort from her on this, rather to my sur-

prise, and when she spoke again it was all quietly. "I think Linda and I had best withdraw. We've been here a month — it will have served our purpose."

"Mercy on us, that will be a bore!" I protested; and for the rest of the evening, till we separated — our conversation had taken place after dinner at the Kursaal — she said little, preserving a subdued and almost injured air. This somehow did n't appeal to me, since it was absurd that Louisa Pallant, of all women, should propose to put me in the wrong. If ever a woman had been in the wrong herself —! I had even no need to go into that. Archie and I, at all events, usually attended the ladies back to their own door — they lived in a street of minor accommodation at a certain distance from the Rooms — where we parted for the night late, on the big cobblestones, in the little sleeping German town, under the closed windows of which, suggesting stuffy interiors, our cheerful English partings resounded. On this occasion indeed they rather languished; the question that had come up for me with Mrs. Pallant appeared — and by no intention of mine — to have brushed the young couple with its chill. Archie and Linda too struck me as conscious and dumb.

As I walked back to our hotel with my nephew I passed my hand into his arm and put to him, by no roundabout approach, the question of whether he were in serious peril of love.

"I don't know, I don't know — really, uncle, I don't know!" was, however, all the satisfaction I could extract from the youth, who had n't the small-

est vein of introspection. He might n't know, but before we reached the inn — we had a few more words on the subject — it seemed to me that *I* did. His mind was n't formed to accommodate at one time many subjects of thought, but Linda Pallant certainly constituted for the moment its principal furniture. She pervaded his consciousness, she solicited his curiosity, she associated herself, in a manner as yet informal and undefined, with his future. I could see that she held, that she beguiled him as no one had ever done. I did n't betray to him, however, that perception, and I spent my night a prey to the consciousness that, after all, it had been none of my business to provide him with the sense of being captivated. To put him in relation with a young enchantress was the last thing his mother had expected of me or that I had expected of myself. Moreover it was quite my opinion that he himself was too young to be a judge of enchantresses. Mrs. Pallant was right and I had given high proof of levity in regarding her, with her beautiful daughter, as a "resource." There were other resources — one of which *would* be most decidedly to clear out. What did I know after all about the girl except that I rejoiced to have escaped from marrying her mother? That mother, it was true, was a singular person, and it was strange her conscience should have begun to fidget in advance of my own. It was strange she should so soon have felt Archie's peril, and even stranger that she should have then wished to "save" him. The ways of women were infinitely subtle, and it was no novelty to me that one never knew where they would turn up. As I have n't hesi-

tated in this report to expose the irritable side of my own nature I shall confess that I even wondered if my old friend's solicitude had n't been a deeper artifice. Was n't it possibly a plan of her own for making sure of my young man — though I did n't quite see the logic of it? If she regarded him, which she might in view of his large fortune, as a great catch, might n't she have arranged this little comedy, in their personal interest, with the girl?

That possibility at any rate only made it a happier thought that I should win my companion to some curiosity about other places. There were many of course much more worth his attention than Homburg. In the course of the morning — it was after our early luncheon — I walked round to Mrs. Pallant's to let her know I was ready to take action; but even while I went I again felt the unlikelihood of the part attributed by my fears and by the mother's own, so far as they had been roused, to Linda. Certainly if she was such a girl as these fears represented her she would fly at higher game. It was with an eye to high game, Mrs. Pallant had frankly admitted to me, that she had been trained, and such an education, to say nothing of such a performer, justified a hope of greater returns. A young American, the fruit of scant "modelling," who could give her nothing but pocket-money, was a very moderate prize, and if she had been prepared to marry for ambition — there was no such hardness in her face or tone, but then there never is — her mark would be inevitably a "personage" *quelconque*. I was received at my friend's lodging with the announcement that she had left Homburg with

her daughter half an hour before. The good woman who had entertained the pair professed to know nothing of their movements beyond the fact that they had gone to Frankfort, where, however, it was her belief that they did n't intend to remain. They were evidently travelling beyond. Sudden, their decision to move? Oh yes, the matter of a moment. They must have spent the night in packing, they had so many things and such pretty ones; and their poor maid, all the morning, had scarce had time to swallow her coffee. But they clearly were ladies accustomed to come and go. It did n't matter — with such rooms as hers she never wanted: there was a new family coming in at three.

IV

This piece of strategy left me staring and made me, I confess, quite furious. My only consolation was that Archie, when I told him, looked as blank as myself, and that the trick touched him more nearly, for I was not now in love with Louisa. We agreed that we required an explanation and we pretended to expect one the next day in the shape of a letter satisfactory even to the point of being apologetic. When I say "we" pretended I mean that I did, for my suspicion that he knew what had been on foot — through an arrangement with Linda — lasted only a moment. If his resentment was less than my own his surprise was equally great. I had been willing to bolt, but I felt slighted by the ease with which Mrs. Pallant had shown she could part with us. Archie professed no sense of a grievance, because in the first place he was shy about it and because in the second it was evidently not definite to him that he had been encouraged —equipped as he was, I think, with no very particular idea of what constituted encouragement. He was fresh from the wonderful country in which there may between the ingenuous young be so little question of "intentions." He was but dimly conscious of his own and could by no means have told me whether he had been challenged or been jilted. I did n't want to exasperate him, but when at the end of three days more we were still without news of our late companions I

observed that it was very simple: they must have been just hiding from us; they thought us dangerous; they wished to avoid entanglements. They had found us too attentive and wished not to raise false hopes. He appeared to accept this explanation and even had the air — so at least I inferred from his asking me no questions — of judging the matter might be delicate for myself. The poor youth was altogether much mystified, and I smiled at the image in his mind of Mrs. Pallant fleeing from his uncle's importunities.

We decided to leave Homburg, but if we did n't pursue our fugitives it was n't simply that we were ignorant of where they were. I could have found that out with a little trouble, but I was deterred by the reflexion that this would be Louisa's reasoning. She was a dreadful humbug and her departure had been a provocation — I fear it was in that stupid conviction that I made out a little independent itinerary with Archie. I even believed we should learn where they were quite soon enough, and that our patience — even my young man's — would be longer than theirs. Therefore I uttered a small private cry of triumph when three weeks later — we happened to be at Interlaken — he reported to me that he had received a note from Miss Pallant. The form of this confidence was his enquiring if there were particular reasons why we should longer delay our projected visit to the Italian lakes. Might n't the fear of the hot weather, which was moreover at that season our native temperature, cease to operate, the middle of September having arrived? I answered that we would start on the morrow if he liked, and then, pleased

apparently that I was so easy to deal with, he revealed his little secret. He showed me his letter, which was a graceful natural document — it covered with a few flowing strokes but a single page of note-paper — not at all compromising to the young lady. If, however, it was almost the apology I had looked for — save that this should have come from the mother — it was not ostensibly in the least an invitation. It mentioned casually — the mention was mainly in the words at the head of her paper — that they were on the Lago Maggiore, at Baveno; but it consisted mainly of the expression of a regret that they had had so abruptly to leave Homburg. Linda failed to say under what necessity they had found themselves; she only hoped we had n't judged them too harshly and would accept "this hasty line" as a substitute for the omitted good-bye. She also hoped our days were passing pleasantly and with the same lovely weather that prevailed south of the Alps; and she remained very sincerely and with the kindest remembrances —!

The note contained no message from her mother, and it was open to me to suppose, as I should prefer, either that Mrs. Pallant had n't known she was writing or that they wished to make us think she had n't known. The letter might pass as a common civility of the girl's to a person with whom she had been on easy terms. It was, however, for something more than this that my nephew took it; so at least I gathered from the touching candour of his determination to go to Baveno. I judged it idle to drag him another way; he had money in his own pocket and was quite capable of giving me the slip. Yet — such are the

sweet incongruities of youth — when I asked him to what tune he had been thinking of Linda since they left us in the lurch he replied: "Oh I have n't been thinking at all! Why should I?" This fib was accompanied by an exorbitant blush. Since he was to obey his young woman's signal I must equally make out where it would take him, and one splendid morning we started over the Simplon in a post-chaise.

I represented to him successfully that it would be in much better taste for us to alight at Stresa, which as every one knows is a resort of tourists, also on the shore of the major lake, at about a mile's distance from Baveno. If we stayed at the latter place we should have to inhabit the same hotel as our friends, and this might be awkward in view of a strained relation with them. Nothing would be easier than to go and come between the two points, especially by the water, which would give Archie a chance for unlimited paddling. His face lighted up at the vision of a pair of oars; he pretended to take my plea for discretion very seriously, and I could see that he had at once begun to calculate opportunities for navigation with Linda. Our post-chaise — I had insisted on easy stages and we were three days on the way — deposited us at Stresa toward the middle of the afternoon, and it was within an amazingly short time that I found myself in a small boat with my nephew, who pulled us over to Baveno with vigorous strokes. I remember the sweetness of the whole impression. I had had it before, but to my companion it was new, and he thought it as pretty as the opera: the enchanting beauty of the place and hour, the stillness of the

air and water, with the romantic fantastic Borromean Islands set as great jewels in a crystal globe. We disembarked at the steps by the garden-foot of the hotel, and somehow it seemed a perfectly natural part of the lovely situation that I should immediately become conscious of Mrs. Pallant and her daughter seated on the terrace and quietly watching us. They had the air of expectation, which I think we had counted on. I had n't even asked Archie if he had answered Linda's note; this was between themselves and in the way of supervision I had done enough in coming with him.

There is no doubt our present address, all round, lacked a little the easiest grace — or at least Louisa's and mine did. I felt too much the appeal of her exhibition to notice closely the style of encounter of the young people. I could n't get it out of my head, as I have sufficiently indicated, that Mrs. Pallant was playing a game, and I 'm afraid she saw in my face that this suspicion had been the motive of my journey. I had come there to find her out. The knowledge of my purpose could n't help her to make me very welcome, and that 's why I speak of our meeting constrainedly. We observed none the less all the forms, and the admirable scene left us plenty to talk about. I made no reference before Linda to the retreat from Homburg. This young woman looked even prettier than she had done on the eve of that manœuvre and gave no sign of an awkward consciousness. She again so struck me as a charming clever girl that I was freshly puzzled to know why we should get — or should have got — into a tangle about her. People had to want to complicate a situation to do it on so

simple a pretext as that Linda was in every way beautiful. This was the clear fact: so why should n't the presumptions be in favour of every result of it? One of the effects of that cause, on the spot, was that at the end of a very short time Archie proposed to her to take a turn with him in his boat, which awaited us at the foot of the steps. She looked at her mother with a smiling "May I, mamma?" and Mrs. Pallant answered "Certainly, darling, if you're not afraid." At this — I scarcely knew why — I sought the relief of laughter: it must have affected me as comic that the girl's general competence should suffer the imputation of that particular flaw. She gave me a quick slightly sharp look as she turned away with my nephew; it appeared to challenge me a little — "Pray what's the matter with *you?*" It was the first expression of the kind I had ever seen in her face. Mrs. Pallant's attention, on the other hand, rather strayed from me; after we had been left there together she sat silent, not heeding me, looking at the lake and mountains — at the snowy crests crowned with the flush of evening. She seemed not even to follow our young companions as they got into their boat and pushed off. For some minutes I respected her mood; I walked slowly up and down the terrace and lighted a cigar, as she had always permitted me to do at Homburg. I found in her, it was true, rather a new air of weariness; her fine cold well-bred face was pale; I noted in it new lines of fatigue, almost of age. At last I stopped in front of her and — since she looked so sad — asked if she had been having bad news.

"The only bad news was when I learned — through

your nephew's note to Linda — that you were coming to us."

"Ah then he wrote?"

"Certainly he wrote."

"You take it all harder than I do," I returned as I sat down beside her. And then I added, smiling: "Have you written to his mother?"

Slowly at last, and more directly, she faced me. "Take care, take care, or you'll have been more brutal than you'll afterwards like," she said with an air of patience before the inevitable.

"Never, never! Unless you think me brutal if I ask whether you knew when Linda wrote."

She had an hesitation. "Yes, she showed me her letter. She would n't have done anything else. I let it go because I did n't know what course was best. I'm afraid to oppose her to her face."

"Afraid, my dear friend, with that girl?"

"That girl? Much you know about her! It did n't follow you'd come. I did n't take that for granted."

"I'm like you," I said — "I too am afraid of my nephew. I don't venture to oppose him to his face. The only thing I could do — once he wished it — was to come with him."

"I see. Well, there are grounds, after all, on which I'm glad," she rather inscrutably added.

"Oh I was conscientious about that! But I've no authority; I can neither drive him nor stay him — I can use no force," I explained. "Look at the way he's pulling that boat and see if you can fancy me."

"You could tell him she's a bad hard girl — one

who'd poison any good man's life!" my companion broke out with a passion that startled me.

At first I could only gape. "Dear lady, what do you mean?"

She bent her face into her hands, covering it over with them, and so remained a minute; then she continued a little differently, though as if she had n't heard my question: "I hoped you were too disgusted with us — after the way we left you planted."

"It was disconcerting assuredly, and it might have served if Linda had n't written. That patched it up," I gaily professed. But my gaiety was thin, for I was still amazed at her violence of a moment before. "Do you really mean that she won't do?" I added.

She made no direct answer; she only said after a little that it did n't matter whether the crisis should come a few weeks sooner or a few weeks later, since it was destined to come at the first chance, the favouring moment. Linda had marked my young man — and when Linda had marked a thing!

"Bless my soul — how very grim!" But I did n't understand. "Do you mean she's in love with him?"

"It's enough if she makes him think so — though even that is n't essential."

Still I was at sea. "If she makes him think so? Dear old friend, what's your idea? I've observed her, I've watched her, and when all's said what has she done? She has been civil and pleasant to him, but it would have been much more marked if she had n't. She has really shown him, with her youth and her natural charm, nothing more than common friendliness. Her note was nothing; he let me see it."

"I don't think you've heard every word she has said to him," Mrs. Pallant returned with an emphasis that still struck me as perverse.

"No more have you, I take it!" I promptly cried. She evidently meant more than she said; but if this excited my curiosity it also moved, in a different connexion, my indulgence.

"No, but I know my own daughter. She's a most remarkable young woman."

"You've an extraordinary tone about her," I declared — "such a tone as I think I've never before heard on a mother's lips. I've had the same impression from you — that of a disposition to 'give her away,' but never yet so strong."

At this Mrs. Pallant got up; she stood there looking down at me. "You make my reparation — my expiation — difficult!" And leaving me still more astonished she moved along the terrace.

I overtook her presently and repeated her words. "Your reparation — your expiation? What on earth are you talking about?"

"You know perfectly what I mean — it's too magnanimous of you to pretend you don't."

"Well, at any rate," I said, "I don't see what good it does me, or what it makes up to me for, that you should abuse your daughter."

"Oh I don't care; I shall save him!" she cried as we went, and with an extravagance, as I felt, of sincerity. At the same moment two ladies, apparently English, came toward us — scattered groups had been sitting there and the inmates of the hotel were moving to and fro — and I observed the immediate charm-

ing transition, the fruit of such years of social practice, by which, as they greeted us, her tension and her impatience dropped to recognition and pleasure. They stopped to speak to her and she enquired with sweet propriety as to the "continued improvement" of their sister. I strolled on and she presently rejoined me; after which she had a peremptory note. "Come away from this — come down into the garden." We descended to that blander scene, strolled through it and paused on the border of the lake.

V

The charm of the evening had deepened, the stillness was like a solemn expression on a beautiful face and the whole air of the place divine. In the fading light my nephew's boat was too far out to be perceived. I looked for it a little and then, as I gave it up, remarked that from such an excursion as that, on such a lake and at such an hour, a young man and a young woman of common sensibility could only come back doubly pledged to each other.

To this observation Mrs. Pallant's answer was, superficially at least, irrelevant; she said after a pause: "With you, my dear man, one has certainly to dot one's 'i's.' Have n't you discovered, and did n't I tell you at Homburg, that we're miserably poor?"

"Is n't 'miserably' rather too much — living as you are at an expensive hotel?"

Well, she promptly met this. "They take us *en pension*, for ever so little a day. I've been knocking about Europe long enough to learn all sorts of horrid arts. Besides, don't speak of hotels; we've spent half our life in them and Linda told me only last night that she hoped never to put her foot into one again. She feels that when she comes to such a place as this she ought, if things were decently right, to find a villa of her own."

"Then her companion there's perfectly competent

to give her one. Don't think I've the least desire to push them into each other's arms — I only ask to wash my hands of them. But I should like to know why you want, as you said just now, to save him. When you speak as if your daughter were a monster I take it you're not serious."

She was facing me in the rich short twilight, and to describe herself as immeasurably more serious perhaps than she had ever been in her life she had only to look at me without protestation. "It's Linda's standard. God knows I myself could get on! She's ambitious, luxurious, determined to have what she wants — more 'on the make' than any one I've ever seen. Of course it's open to you to tell me it's my own fault, that I was so before her and have made her so. But does that make me like it any better?"

"Dear Mrs. Pallant, you're wonderful, you're terrible," I could only stammer, lost in the desert of my thoughts.

"Oh yes, you've made up your mind about me; you see me in a certain way and don't like the trouble of changing. *Votre siège est fait.* But you'll *have* to change — if you've any generosity!" Her eyes shone in the summer dusk and the beauty of her youth came back to her.

"Is this a part of the reparation, of the expiation?" I demanded. "I don't see what you ever did to Archie."

"It's enough that he belongs to you. But it is n't for you I do it — it's for myself," she strangely went on.

"Doubtless you've your own reasons — which I can't penetrate. But can't you sacrifice something else? Must you sacrifice your only child?"

"My only child's my punishment, my only child's my stigma!" she cried in her exaltation.

"It seems to me rather that you're hers."

"Hers? What does *she* know of such things? — what can she ever feel? She's cased in steel; she has a heart of marble. It's true — it's true," said Louisa Pallant. "She appals me!"

I laid my hand on my poor friend's; I uttered, with the intention of checking and soothing her, the first incoherent words that came into my head and I drew her toward a bench a few steps away. She dropped upon it; I placed myself near her and besought her to consider well what she said. She owed me nothing and I wished no one injured, no one denounced or exposed for my sake.

"For your sake? Oh I'm not thinking of you!" she answered; and indeed the next moment I thought my words rather fatuous. "It's a satisfaction to my own conscience — for I *have* one, little as you may think I've a right to speak of it. I've been punished by my sin itself. I've been hideously worldly, I've thought only of that, and I've taught her to be so — to do the same. That's the only instruction I've ever given her, and she has learned the lesson so well that now I see it stamped there in all her nature, on all her spirit and on all her form, I'm horrified at my work. For years we've lived that way; we've thought of nothing else. She has profited so well by my beautiful influence that she has gone far beyond the great orig-

inal. I say I'm horrified," Mrs. Pallant dreadfully wound up, "because she's horrible."

"My poor extravagant friend," I pleaded, "is n't it still more so to hear a mother say such things?"

"Why so, if they're abominably true? Besides, I don't care what I say if I save him."

I could only gape again at this least expected of all my adventures. "Do you expect me then to repeat to him —?"

"Not in the least," she broke in; "I'll do it myself." At this I uttered some strong inarticulate protest, but she went on with the grimmest simplicity: "I was very glad at first, but it would have been better if we had n't met."

"I don't agree to that, for you interest me," I rather ruefully professed, "immensely."

"I don't care if I do — so I interest *him*."

"You must reflect then that your denunciation can only strike me as, for all its violence, vague and unconvincing. Never had a girl less the appearance of bearing such charges out. You know how I've admired her."

"You know nothing about her! *I* do, you see, for she's the work of my hand!" And Mrs. Pallant laughed for bitterness. "I've watched her for years, and little by little, for the last two or three, it has come over me. There's not a tender spot in her whole composition. To arrive at a brilliant social position, if it were necessary, she would see me drown in this lake without lifting a finger, she would stand there and see it — she would push me in — and never feel a pang. That's my young lady!" Her lucidity chilled me to

the soul — it seemed to shine so flawless. "To climb up to the top and be splendid and envied there," she went on —"to do that at any cost or by any meanness and cruelty is the only thing she has a heart for. She'd lie for it, she'd steal for it, she'd kill for it!" My companion brought out these words with a cold confidence that had evidently behind it some occult past process of growth. I watched her pale face and glowing eyes; she held me breathless and frowning, but her strange vindictive, or at least retributive, passion irresistibly imposed itself. I found myself at last believing her, pitying her more than I pitied the subject of her dreadful analysis. It was as if she had held her tongue for longer than she could bear, suffering more and more the importunity of the truth. It relieved her thus to drag that to the light, and still she kept up the high and most unholy sacrifice. "God in his mercy has let me see it in time, but his ways are strange that he has let me see it in my daughter. It's myself he has let me see — myself as I was for years. But she's worse — she *is*, I assure you; she's worse than I intended or dreamed." Her hands were clasped tightly together in her lap; her low voice quavered and her breath came short; she looked up at the southern stars as if *they* would understand.

"Have you ever spoken to her as you speak to me?" I finally asked. "Have you ever put before her this terrible arraignment?"

"Put it before her? How can I put it before her when all she would have to say would be: 'You, *you*, you base one, who made me—?'"

"Then why do you want to play her a trick?"

"I'm not bound to tell you, and you would n't see my point if I did. I should play that boy a far worse one if I were to stay my hand."

Oh I had my view of this. "If he loves her he won't believe a word you say."

"Very possibly, but I shall have done my duty."

"And shall you say to him," I asked, "simply what you've said to me?"

"Never mind what I shall say to him. It will be something that will perhaps helpfully affect him. Only," she added with her proud decision, "I must lose no time."

"If you're so bent on gaining time," I said, "why did you let her go out in the boat with him?"

"Let her? how could I prevent it?"

"But she asked your permission."

"Ah that," she cried, "is all a part of all the comedy!"

It fairly hushed me to silence, and for a moment more she said nothing. "Then she does n't know you hate her?" I resumed.

"I don't know what she knows. She has depths and depths, and all of them bad. Besides, I don't hate her in the least; I just pity her for what I've made of her. But I pity still more the man who may find himself married to her."

"There's not much danger of there being any such person," I wailed, "at the rate you go on."

"I beg your pardon — there's a perfect possibility," said my companion. "She'll marry — she'll marry 'well.' She'll marry a title as well as a fortune."

"It's a pity my nephew has n't a title," I attempted the grimace of suggesting.

She seemed to wonder. "I see you think I want that, and that I'm acting a part. God forgive you! Your suspicion's perfectly natural. How can any one *tell*," asked Louisa Pallant — "with people like us?"

Her utterance of these words brought tears to my eyes. I laid my hand on her arm, holding her a while, and we looked at each other through the dusk. "You could n't do more if he were my son."

"Oh if he had been your son he'd have kept out of it! I like him for himself. He's simple and sane and honest — he needs affection."

"He would have quite the most remarkable of mothers-in-law!" I commented.

Mrs. Pallant gave a small dry laugh — she was n't joking. We lingered by the lake while I thought over what she had said to me and while she herself apparently thought. I confess that even close at her side and under the strong impression of her sincerity, her indifference to the conventional graces, my imagination, my constitutional scepticism began to range. Queer ideas came into my head. Was the comedy on *her* side and not on the girl's, and was she posturing as a magnanimous woman at poor Linda's expense? Was she determined, in spite of the young lady's preference, to keep her daughter for a grander personage than a young American whose dollars were not numerous enough — numerous as they were — to make up for his want of high relationships, and had she invented at once the boldest and the subtlest of games

in order to keep the case in her hands? If she was prepared really to address herself to Archie she would have to go very far to overcome the mistrust he would be sure to feel at a proceeding superficially so sinister? Was she prepared to go far enough? The answer to these doubts was simply the way I had been touched — it came back to me the next moment — when she used the words "people like us." Their effect was to wring my heart. She seemed to kneel in the dust, and I felt in a manner ashamed that I had let her sink to it. She said to me at last that I must wait no longer, I must go away before the young people came back. They were staying long, too long; all the more reason then she should deal with my nephew that night. I must drive back to Stresa, or if I liked I could go on foot: it was n't far — for an active man. She disposed of me freely, she was so full of her purpose; and after we had quitted the garden and returned to the terrace above she seemed almost to push me to leave her — I felt her fine consecrated hands fairly quiver on my shoulders. I was ready to do as she prescribed; she affected me painfully, she had given me a "turn," and I wanted to get away from her. But before I went I asked her why Linda should regard my young man as such a *parti;* it did n't square after all with her account of the girl's fierce ambitions. By that account these favours to one so graceless were a woeful waste of time.

"Oh she has worked it all out; she has regarded the question in every light," said Mrs. Pallant. "If she has made up her mind it 's because she sees what she can do."

"Do you mean that she has talked it over with you?"

My friend's wonderful face pitied my simplicity. "Lord! for what do you take us? We don't talk things over to-day. We know each other's point of view and only have to act. We observe the highest proprieties of speech. We never for a moment name anything ugly — we only just go at it. We can take definitions, which are awkward things, for granted."

"But in this case," I nevertheless urged, "the poor thing can't possibly be aware of your point of view."

"No," she conceded — "that's because I have n't played fair. Of course she could n't expect I'd cheat. There ought to be honour among thieves. But it was open to her to do the same."

"What do you mean by the same?"

"She might have fallen in love with a poor man. Then I should have been 'done.'"

"A rich one's better; he can do more," I replied with conviction.

At this she appeared to have, in the oddest way, a momentary revulsion. "So you'd have reason to know if you had led the life that we have! Never to have had really enough — I mean to do just the few simple things we've wanted; never to have had the sinews of war, I suppose you'd call them, the funds for a campaign; to have felt every day and every hour the hard eternal pinch and found the question of dollars and cents — and so horridly few of them — mixed up with every experience, with every impulse: that *does* make one mercenary, does make money seem a good beyond all others; which it's quite nat-

ural it should! And it's why Linda's of the opinion that a fortune's always a fortune. She knows all about that of your nephew, how it's invested, how it may be expected to increase, exactly on what sort of footing it would enable her to live. She has decided that it's enough, and enough is as good as a feast. She thinks she could lead him by the nose, and I dare say she could. She'll of course make him live in these countries; she has n't the slightest intention of casting her pearls — but *basta!*" said my friend. "I think she has views upon London, because in England he can hunt and shoot, and that will make him leave her more or less to herself."

"I don't know about his leaving her to herself, but it strikes me that he would like the rest of that matter very much," I returned. "That's not at all a bad programme even from Archie's point of view."

"It's no use thinking of princes," she pursued as if she had n't heard me. "They're most of them more in want of money even than we. Therefore 'greatness' is out of the question — we really recognised that at an early stage. Your nephew's exactly the sort of young man we've always built upon — if he was n't, so impossibly, your nephew. From head to foot he was made on purpose. Dear Linda was her mother's own daughter when she recognised him on the spot! One's enough of a prince to-day when one's the right American: such a wonderful price is set on one's not being the wrong! It does as well as anything and it's a great simplification. If you don't believe me go to London and see."

She had come with me out to the road. I had said

I would walk back to Stresa and we stood there in the sweet dark warmth. As I took her hand, bidding her good-night, I could n't but exhale a compassion. "Poor Linda, poor Linda!"

"Oh she 'll live to do better," said Mrs. Pallant.

"How can she do better — since you 've described all she finds Archie as perfection?"

She knew quite what she meant. "Ah better for *him!*"

I still had her hand — I still sought her eyes. "How came it you could throw me over — such a woman as you?"

"Well, my friend, if I had n't thrown you over how could I do this for you?" On which, disengaging herself, she turned quickly away.

VI

I DON'T know how deeply she flushed as she made, in the form of her question, this avowal, which was a retraction of a former denial and the real truth, as I permitted myself to believe; but was aware of the colour of my own cheeks while I took my way to Stresa — a walk of half an hour — in the attenuating night. The new and singular character in which she had appeared to me produced in me an emotion that would have made sitting still in a carriage impossible. This same stress kept me up after I had reached my hotel; as I knew I should n't sleep it was useless to go to bed. Long, however, as I deferred this ceremony, Archie had not reappeared when the inn-lights began here and there to be dispensed with. I felt even slightly anxious for him, wondering at possible mischances. Then I reflected that in case of an accident on the lake, that is of his continued absence from Baveno — Mrs. Pallant would already have dispatched me a messenger. It was foolish moreover to suppose anything could have happened to him after putting off from Baveno by water to rejoin me, for the evening was absolutely windless and more than sufficiently clear and the lake as calm as glass. Besides I had unlimited confidence in his power to take care of himself in a much tighter place. I went to my room at last; his own was at some distance, the people of the hotel not having been able — it was the height of the au-

tumn season — to make us contiguous. Before I went to bed I had occasion to ring for a servant, and I then learned by a chance enquiry that my nephew had returned an hour before and had gone straight to his own quarters. I had n't supposed he could come in without my seeing him — I was wandering about the saloons and terraces — and it had not occurred to me to knock at his door. I had half a mind to do so now — I was so anxious as to how I should find him; but I checked myself, for evidently he had wanted to dodge me. This did n't diminish my curiosity, and I slept even less than I had expected. His so markedly shirking our encounter — for if he had n't perceived me downstairs he might have looked for me in my room — was a sign that Mrs. Pallant's interview with him would really have come off. What had she said to him? What strong measures had she taken? That almost morbid resolution I still seemed to hear the ring of pointed to conceivable extremities that I shrank from considering. She had spoken of these things while we parted there as something she would do for me; but I had made the mental comment in walking away from her that she had n't done it yet. It would n't truly be done till Archie had truly backed out. Perhaps it was done by this time; his avoiding me seemed almost a proof. That was what I thought of most of the night. I spent a considerable part of it at my window, looking out to the couchant Alps. *Had* he thought better of it? — was he making up his mind to think better of it? There was a strange contradiction in the matter; there were in fact more contradictions than ever. I had taken from Louisa what

she told me of Linda, and yet that other idea made me ashamed of my nephew. I was sorry for the girl; I regretted her loss of a great chance, if loss it was to be; and yet I hoped her mother's grand treachery — I did n't know what to call it — had been at least, to her lover, thoroughgoing. It would need strong action in that lady to justify his retreat. For him too I was sorry — if she had made on him the impression she desired. Once or twice I was on the point of getting into my dressing-gown and going forth to condole with him. I was sure he too had jumped up from his bed and was looking out of his window at the everlasting hills.

But I am bound to say that when we met in the morning for breakfast he showed few traces of ravage. Youth is strange; it has resources that later experience seems only to undermine. One of these is the masterly resource of beautiful blankness. As we grow older and cleverer we think that too simple, too crude; we dissimulate more elaborately, but with an effect much less baffling. My young man looked not in the least as if he had lain awake or had something on his mind; and when I asked him what he had done after my premature departure — I explained this by saying I had been tired of waiting for him; fagged with my journey I had wanted to go to bed — he replied: "Oh nothing in particular. I hung about the place; I like it better than this one. We had an awfully jolly time on the water. *I* was n't in the least fagged." I did n't worry him with questions; it struck me as gross to try to probe his secret. The only indication he gave was on my saying after breakfast that I should

go over again to see our friends and my appearing to take for granted he would be glad to come too. Then he let fall that he'd stop at Stresa — he had paid them such a tremendous visit; also that he had arrears of letters. There was a freshness in his scruples about the length of his visits, and I knew something about his correspondence, which consisted entirely of twenty pages every week from his mother. But he soothed my anxiety so little that it was really this yearning that carried me back to Baveno. This time I ordered a conveyance, and as I got into it he stood watching me from the porch of the hotel with his hands in his pockets. Then it was for the first time that I saw in the poor youth's face the expression of a person slightly dazed, slightly foolish even, to whom something disagreeable has happened. Our eyes met as I observed him, and I was on the point of saying "You had really better come with me" when he turned away. He went into the house as to escape my call. I said to myself that he had been indeed warned off, but that it would n't take much to bring him back.

The servant to whom I spoke at Baveno described my friends as in a summer-house in the garden, to which he led the way. The place at large had an empty air; most of the inmates of the hotel were dispersed on the lake, on the hills, in picnics, excursions, visits to the Borromean Islands. My guide was so far right as that Linda was in the summer-house, but she was there alone. On finding this the case I stopped short, rather awkwardly — I might have been, from the way I suddenly felt, an unmasked hypocrite, a proved conspirator against her security and honour.

But there was no embarrassment in lovely Linda; she looked up with a cry of pleasure from the book she was reading and held out her hand with engaging frankness. I felt again as if I had no right to that favour, which I pretended not to have noticed. This gave no chill, however, to her pretty manner; she moved a roll of tapestry off the bench so that I might sit down; she praised the place as a delightful shady corner. She had never been fresher, fairer, kinder; she made her mother's awful talk about her a hideous dream. She told me her mother was coming to join her; she had remained indoors to write a letter. One could n't write out there, though it was so nice in other respects: the table refused to stand firm. They too then had pretexts of letters between them — I judged this a token that the situation was tense. It was the only one nevertheless that Linda gave: like Archie she was young enough to carry it off. She had been used to seeing us always together, yet she made no comment on my having come over without him. I waited in vain for her to speak of this — it would only be natural; her omission could n't but have a sense. At last I remarked that my nephew was very unsociable that morning; I had expected him to join me, but he had n't seemed to see the attraction.

"I 'm very glad. You can tell him that if you like," said Linda Pallant.

I wondered at her. "If I tell him he 'll come at once."

"Then don't tell him; I don't want him to come. He stayed too long last night," she went on, "and kept me out on the water till I don't know what o'clock.

That sort of thing is n't done here, you know, and every one was shocked when we came back — or rather, you see, when we did n't! I begged him to bring me in, but he would n't. When we did return — I almost had to take the oars myself — I felt as if every one had been sitting up to time us, to stare at us. It was awfully awkward."

These words much impressed me; and as I have treated the reader to most of the reflexions — some of them perhaps rather morbid — in which I indulged on the subject of this young lady and her mother, I may as well complete the record and let him know that I now wondered whether Linda — candid and accomplished maiden — entertained the graceful thought of strengthening her hold of Archie by attempting to prove he had "compromised" her. "Ah no doubt that was the reason he had a bad conscience last evening!" I made answer. "When he came back to Stresa he sneaked off to his room; he would n't look me in the face."

But my young lady was not to be ruffled. "Mamma was so vexed that she took him apart and gave him a scolding. And to punish *me* she sent me straight to bed. She has very old-fashioned ideas — have n't you, mamma?" she added, looking over my head at Mrs. Pallant, who had just come in behind me.

I forget how her mother met Linda's appeal; Louisa stood there with two letters, sealed and addressed, in her hand. She greeted me gaily and then asked her daughter if she were possessed of postage-stamps. Linda consulted a well-worn little pocket-book and confessed herself destitute; whereupon her mother

gave her the letters with the request that she would go into the hotel, buy the proper stamps at the office, carefully affix them and put the letters into the box. She was to pay for the stamps, not have them put on the bill — a preference for which Mrs. Pallant gave reasons. I had bought some at Stresa that morning and was on the point of offering them when, apparently having guessed my intention, the elder lady silenced me with a look. Linda announced without reserve that she had n't money and Louisa then fumbled for a franc. When she had found and bestowed it the girl kissed her before going off with the letters.

"Darling mother, you have n't any too many of them, have you?" she murmured; and she gave me, sidelong, as she left us, the prettiest half-comical, half-pitiful smile.

"She 's amazing — she 's amazing," said Mrs. Pallant as we looked at each other.

"Does she know what you 've done?"

"She knows I 've done something and she 's making up her mind what it is. She 'll satisfy herself in the course of the next twenty-four hours — if your nephew does n't come back. I think I can promise you he won't."

"And won't she ask you?"

"Never!"

"Shan't you tell her? Can you sit down together in this summer-house, this divine day, with such a dreadful thing as that between you?"

My question found my friend quite ready. "Don't you remember what I told you about our relations — that everything was implied between us and nothing

expressed? The ideas we have had in common — our perpetual worldliness, our always looking out for chances — are not the sort of thing that can be uttered conveniently between persons who like to keep up forms, as we both do: so that, always, if we've understood each other it has been enough. We shall understand each other now, as we've always done, and nothing will be changed. There has always been something between us that could n't be talked about."

"Certainly, she's amazing — she's amazing," I repeated; "but so are you." And then I asked her what she had said to my boy.

She seemed surprised. "Has n't he told you?"

"No, and he never will."

"I'm glad of that," she answered simply.

"But I'm not sure he won't come back. He did n't this morning, but he had already half a mind to."

"That's your imagination," my companion said with her fine authority. "If you knew what I told him you'd be sure."

"And you won't let me know?"

"Never, dear friend."

"And did he believe you?"

"Time will show — but I think so."

"And how did you make it plausible to him that you should take so unnatural a course?"

For a moment she said nothing, only looking at me. Then at last: "I told him the truth."

"The truth?"

"Take him away — take him away!" she broke out. "That's why I got rid of Linda, to tell you you must n't stay — you must leave Stresa to-morrow.

This time it's you who must do it. I can't fly from you again — it costs too much!" And she smiled strangely.

"Don't be afraid; don't be afraid. We'll break camp again to-morrow — ah me! But I want to go myself," I added. I took her hand in farewell, but spoke again while I held it. "The way you put it, about Linda, was very bad?"

"It was horrible."

I turned away — I felt indeed that I could n't stay. She kept me from going to the hotel, as I might meet Linda coming back, which I was far from wishing to do, and showed me another way into the road. Then she turned round to meet her daughter and spend the rest of the morning there with her, spend it before the bright blue lake and the snowy crests of the Alps. When I reached Stresa again I found my young man had gone off to Milan — to see the cathedral, the servant said — leaving a message for me to the effect that, as he should n't be back for a day or two, though there were numerous trains, he had taken a few clothes. The next day I received telegram-notice that he had determined to go on to Venice and begged I would forward the rest of his luggage. "Please don't come after me," this missive added; "I want to be alone; I shall do no harm." That sounded pathetic to me, in the light of what I knew, and I was glad to leave him to his own devices. He proceeded to Venice and I recrossed the Alps. For several weeks after this I expected to discover that he had rejoined Mrs. Pallant; but when we met that November in Paris I saw he had nothing to hide from me save indeed the secret of what

our extraordinary friend had said to him. This he concealed from me then and has concealed ever since. He returned to America before Christmas —when I felt the crisis over. I've never again seen the wronger of my youth. About a year after our more recent adventure her daughter Linda married, in London, a young Englishman the heir to a large fortune, a fortune acquired by his father in some prosaic but flourishing industry. Mrs. Gimingham's admired photographs — such is Linda's present name — may be obtained from the principal stationers. I am convinced her mother was sincere. My nephew has not even yet changed his state, my sister at last thinks it high time. I put before her as soon as I next saw her the incidents here recorded, and — such is the inconsequence of women — nothing can exceed her reprobation of Louisa Pallant.

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(continued from front flap)

kinsman's sister but neither he or she have the will to live out their desire.

The Madonna of the Future, first printed in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1873, is a damning indictment of the would-be American artist in Europe. Mr. Theobald in Florence is a pathetic figure, a painter who would rather sigh after an ideal than sit down at his easel. "Our crude and garish climate," he complains, "our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely conditions, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so."

Louisa Pallant, which first ran in *Harper's* in 1888, is another study in resignation. The American Louisa Pallant, fearing that her daughter Linda is as selfish as she herself, blocks her marriage to the nephew of the lover she threw over years before.

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